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# SAINTS & SCHOLARS

*By*  
STEPHEN GWYNN



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## FOREWORD

MY title, though more accurately descriptive than is customary in collected essays, may lead to some cavilling. It is certainly true that Laperrine was neither scholar nor saint; but his place is with de Foucauld wherever de Foucauld's place may be. Margaret Oliphant, though a woman of letters, does not sit at the board with scholars: I am not so sure but that motherhood brought her through suffering close to the communion of saints.

However, labels are silly things: but it will be much if I can convey to readers something of the vivid interest which certain personalities, some through living contact and some through the printed page, have stirred and maintained in me.

The first three of these papers appeared in the *Cornhill*: that on Mrs. Oliphant in the *Edinburgh Review*: Cardinal Logue in the *Spectator*, Mahaffy in the *Observer* and Father Mathew in *The Student*. "A Scholar" as

## FOREWORD

printed here originally formed part of a chapter in my book, *Garden Wisdom*.

My grateful acknowledgments are made to all concerned.



*Personages in their order :*

A HERMIT OF THE SAHARA	Charles de Foucauld
THE GENERAL OF THE SAHARA	Henri Laperrine
A DON	Mark Pattison
A SCHOLAR	John Gwynn
A GREAT IRISH CHARACTER	Sir J. P. Mahaffy
AN IRISH CARDINAL	Michael Logue
AN APOSTLE	Theobald Mathew
A BIBLE CHRISTIAN	Asenath Nicholson
A MAYNOOTH PROFESSOR	Walter MacDonald
A MOTHER	Margaret Oliphant



A HERMIT OF  
THE SAHARA



# SAINTS AND SCHOLARS

## I

### A HERMIT OF THE SAHARA

THE life of Charles de Foucauld, which M. René Bazin has set out in one of the best of biographies,<sup>1</sup> has interest for the student of Africa, for the student of France, for the student of colonisation, for the student of religion. But chiefly it is a book for the student of human nature—for any such student. Almost technically, Foucauld was a saint. In his lifetime heads of religious orders, conversant with the extremest types of devotion, used the word as a term of exact meaning to describe him. One of them expressed surprise that he had not worked miracles.

Now, saints, as such, leave the ordinary student of human nature cold, but Charles de

<sup>1</sup>A translation by Peter Keelan has been published by Messrs. Burns & Oates. The renderings in this article are, however, mine.—S.G.

Foucauld does not; and the reason is plain to me. This man began as a sluggish, dissolute, idle youth; he turned a strenuous soldier, and then, an explorer on a most perilous expedition. Next, he was a Trappist monk; and last of all, a hermit, or, since that hardly expresses enough, a fakir, practising extravagant asceticism among savage barbarians. All this gives a romantic outline; yet the ordinary man regards such an evolution with curiosity, but without liking. But there is one quality, or combination of qualities, which will reconcile the ordinary man to any eccentricity of conduct. Nobody that I have read of more filled my idea of a gentleman than Charles de Foucauld; and the longer he lived, the more remote from all human amenity his life, the more lovable was the gentleman in every human contact. I am using an English word, admittedly untranslatable, about one who was utterly a Frenchman. If anyone wishes to convince himself how cosmopolitan is the concept to which we give the name of gentleman, he will find material in this story of a gentleman of France who was also a saint of the Sahara.

Charles de Foucauld was born in 1858 of the *noblesse*: his father was the Vicomte de Foucauld. But neither his father nor the

mother, who counts for so much in a Frenchman's life, meant much to him: both died when he was only six, and he was brought up by his mother's father, an old colonel of Engineers, who spoilt the boy, but may have communicated to him a taste for the classics. Wherever come by, he had this: he was idle, but bookish; and his biographer complains that at the *lycée* in Nancy, where he got his schooling from the age of fourteen onwards, he was encouraged to read and think too much. How well an English school would have safeguarded his youth from these dangers. He has left it on record that the secularly appointed masters made no attempt to interfere with the faith in which he had been brought up, but at seventeen he left the *lycée* totally devoid of belief in Christianity. The army was his mark, and he chose St. Cyr rather than the *École Polytechnique* because it was easier to get into. Even so, he barely scraped through the examination, and then was all but rejected as abnormally and unhealthily fat. He took no exercise, cared for no active sports, and did care immensely for talk, for eating and drinking, for card playing—and other gratifications. But in the Cavalry School at Saumur he was popular, because he was always good company—

and generally under arrest for breaches of discipline. He spent money at such a rate that the head of his family had to put him under the control of a *conseil judiciaire* to limit his extravagance.

Then the 4th Hussars, to which he had been posted, were sent to Africa. He was followed by a lady with whom he publicly took up his abode. The colonel ordered that the scandal should be stopped: the subaltern refused point-blank, was struck off the active list, and sent home to France. Six months later, in 1881, insurrection broke out in the south of Algeria; the 4th Hussars (now become Chasseurs d'Afrique) were to be in it, and Foucauld immediately wrote to the War Office offering to obey any orders if he were allowed to rejoin. I do not see the British War Office putting a man back on these conditions, but the French War Office did; and a reformed Charles de Foucauld took the field, with nothing of the past about him except a pocket edition of Aristophanes, and a refusal to smoke at all, since on active service he could not get the particular brand of cigar which he affected. But he did extremely well, and looked after his men with devotion.

It was his only period of active service, but it left him with a love for the common soldier.



Long after, he told one of them that the African army was even better than the home forces. "Half the men in my platoon would have made first-rate monks." "That may have been an exaggeration," said the poilu who recounted this observation; "but it shows the friendly feeling he had kept for us." There was perhaps more in the saying than the old trooper recognised. There was the hermit's desire to disavow, as between old soldiers, any exceptional grace of nature. There was, too, the wisdom which he put into advice for one charged with a medical mission to the Touaregs. "Don't be the senior medical officer; don't even be the doctor with them. Don't take offence at their familiarities or easy-going ways. Be human, be charitable, always be merry. You must always laugh, even when you are saying the simplest things. Look at me; you see I'm always showing my ugly teeth. Your laugh puts good humour into your neighbour, the man you speak to: it brings human beings together, helps them to understand each other. Sometimes it brightens up a gloomy character: it is a charity. When you are in the midst of the Touaregs you must always be laughing." Such a philosophy explains how this solitary came to be adored by every detachment of

French troops that found passing quarters near his cell.—But I have not told the steps that lay between the lieutenant on active service and the holy man.

War against the Arabs had kindled a keen desire in him to study that race: he applied for long leave to undertake a journey among them, and on being refused, sent in his papers and prepared for exploration on his own account. But he directed his purpose now beyond the French sphere of influence, to the interior of Morocco—from which at that time the European was rigidly excluded, except under the closest supervision. Foucauld's intention was to visit precisely those places which the Moorish authorities least desired to be known. The danger was as great as that of any reconnaissance behind the enemy's lines in war. Disguise was inevitable, and only two choices offered: he could go as a Moor, or as a Jew. During a year's preliminary study at Algiers he decided for the Jew. This involved learning Hebrew as well as Arabic, and a special study of Jewish customs. Guided by the rabbi Mardocai, a native of Southern Morocco, who had carried out investigations for various learned societies, he set out in June, 1883, and the journey lasted almost a year. The self-indul-

gent boy of twenty had become a young man of twenty-five who not only forced the reluctant Mardocai into all the most dangerous regions, but endured constant privations, and worse. "It was a trifle to go barefoot in every town, to be insulted and stoned; but to live constantly with Moorish Jews, the most wretched and repugnant of creatures, save for a few rare exceptions, was a torment. They talked to me as a brother, laid their hearts bare, bragged of dirty crimes, confided to me their disgusting sentiments." Yet these were advantages for his purpose; and already a purpose was all he cared about. On the road, travelling with a caravan, he always carried a tiny writing-pad in the palm of his left hand, a stump of pencil in his right, and so noted all the features of the road, or took compass bearings. "I was writing," he says, "nearly all the time on the march, and all the time when the country presented features. Nobody ever noticed it: I took the precaution to march before or behind my companion, and the bagginess of my garments helped to hide the motion of my hands. The contempt for Jews assisted my isolation."

Sextant observations were more difficult and had, for the most part, to be carried out in villages at night, in secret if possible; but

if company were unavoidable, the sextant was a means of reading the future in the heavens, a prevention against cholera, or an instrument to tell the time. If it had to be used in open country, the resource was to withdraw for a few minutes on pretext of prayer. Working under these conditions, Foucauld returned having more than doubled the length of routes surveyed in Morocco, and adding other topographical details with a similar abundance. Manifestly the interest was only in a secondary sense geographical: its aim was military. The writing and publication of his book occupied two years and a half; it appeared in 1888 and brought him much reputation. In the interval he had again journeyed far in the Sahara; he had visited the Holy Land. Two things were already clear: his instinctive movement away from Europe, towards the Mohammedan world, and, not less, his passion for solitude. The world expected further explorations, further scientific results of travel from this young man, who at thirty had already made his mark.

But from the long plunge into wholly un-European conditions in Morocco he had brought back one leading impression. Everybody about him in that year prayed as regularly as they ate and drank. Beginning to regard his own atti-

tude as abnormal and unnatural, he told a friend, perhaps only in joke, that he had thoughts of turning Mohammedan. But in France his mind was possessed by a new preoccupation. He lived among devout Catholics who were also highly educated men and women of the world, and he let one or two of them know that he envied their faith. At a kinswoman's house he met the man whose influence was to be decisive.

M. Bazin has a novelist's skill, and the Abbé Huvelin is as living to readers as Charles de Foucauld. Months after their casual meeting in a drawing-room the Abbé saw a young man walk into his confessional, who bowed instead of kneeling, and said:

“‘Monsieur l'Abbé, I have not faith: I have come to ask you to instruct me.’

“The priest looked at him.

“‘Kneel down, make your confession to God: you will believe.’

“‘But that is not what I came for.’

“‘Make your confession.’

“The man who desired to believe felt that he could not find light till he had received pardon. He knelt down, and confessed his whole life.

“When the Abbé saw the penitent rise up shriven, he spoke again:

“‘You are fasting?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Go and communicate.’

“And Charles de Foucauld went up immediately to the holy table and made, for the second time, his ‘first communion.’ ”

This was before the appearance of his book. Two years passed before he announced (only to his nearest relatives) his resolution to become a Trappist monk. In January, 1890, he entered the monastery of Notre Dame des Neiges, in the mountains of Languedoc. Neither cold nor hunger caused him any difficulty; nor did the change of associations make any embarrassment. “I used to talk to him as I would to a peasant,” said one old lay brother to M. Bazin. Soon he was transferred, as he desired, from France to Asia Minor, where, two days’ march from Alexandretta, the Trappists had a house in Turkey. Here, doing rough field work, or darning and patching in the laundry, he found his duty for a while, but he did not find content. He ate only once a day, had short and broken sleep; yet he obeyed a rule which planned a sufficiency of food and sleep for the ordinary human body. He was in a community of silence, yet he was in a community. He wanted more. He wanted to be his own judge of what



privations should be faced; he wanted a completer solitude. Above all, he wanted to get out of the recognised order. Speaking profanely, I should say that an adventurous heart did not find the Trappist life enough of an adventure. For a dandified young man who had spent years of sensuality the Trappist rule meant mortifying the flesh; but asceticism cost his nature nothing. What he wanted was to be vile in the sight of men. As a Trappist monk you might be ascetic, but you were in a sense respectable: you were not the mark for mockery and insult. He had passed as a Jew in Morocco, and he knew what insult was. The mortification which he sought after was mortification of the spirit.

His very desire for further trials led him to a trial of obedience. It was not easy for him to leave others to decide whether he should follow his call. His purpose sprang from the vision which in his visit to Jerusalem had possessed his mind. It was, to be as the Founder of his faith had been at Nazareth—"a poor working man, lost in low estate and obscurity." He dreamed of founding a company, who should, so far as possible, reproduce that life—should live solely by the labour of their hands, accepting no gift, begging nothing, possessing nothing,

claiming nothing, giving to whoever asked, denying themselves to the utmost possible limit; praying much; living in little groups, in countries where Christianity had never been, or had been driven out. He traced a rule of life for these "Little Brothers of the Sacred Heart"; and this, along with his desire, he confided to his confessor among the Trappists and to his spiritual father, the Abbé Huvelin. Both counselled patience and reflection. But the wise priest in Paris saw that the Trappists would never keep him, and was distressed. "He wants too much," he wrote to another friend. "He is drawn to the unattainable." Opposing no veto to the man's own quest, he was firm on one thing. "You are not fit, in no way fit, to be a guide to others." And again: "Your rule is absolutely impracticable. The Pope hesitated to authorise the Franciscan discipline; he thought it too severe! But this system! To be frank, it frightened me."

As a test of obedience, de Foucauld was ordered to go and study theology at Rome for two years, still as a Trappist. He accepted with gratitude, leaving it in the hands of his superiors whether, at the end of this probation, he should stay in the order or go on his lone mission. But the heads of the order decided that enough



trial had been made: he was bidden to take his course at once, and he went to the Holy Land seeking to be employed about some convent. The Poor Clares gave him a lodging at their gates in Nazareth. He was to sweep their chapel, run their errands, fetch their letters from the post; and he lived there a hermit's life, coming with the poor to ask for his daily bread. When the rumour of him reached the Abbess at Jerusalem, she sent for him, brought him under her observation, and as a result urged him to become a priest. "No," he said, "I am made for the hidden life: a priest must be seen." Yet his counsellor of Paris had long urged him on the same road, and in Nazareth he formed the resolution of being a hermit priest. His first desire was to establish a chapel and a hermitage on the Mount of Olives. For this, permission must be obtained from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and to him he went. M. Bazin describes his manner of appearing:

"His sandals had burst on the road and he had replaced them by pieces of plank fastened by straps. Bands of brown paper, held together by string, concealed the rents in his trousers, which were torn at both knees. Moreover, marching all day in the heat he had suffered

sunstroke: his eyes, forehead and cheeks were swollen and blotched."

Not unnaturally, it was with difficulty that he saw the Patriarch, who not unnaturally put him aside, yet, after inquiry, asked to see this strange visitor again. But Foucauld had taken his first word for his last, and went straight home to France to make his preparation for holy orders—by M. Huvelin's advice, at the Trappist monastery where he had begun. Here, while he studied and prayed, his mission took shape: it was to go where priests were most needed.

"In Morocco, as big as France, with ten million people, not one priest in the interior; in the Sahara, seven or eight times the size of France and far more populated than used to be supposed, a dozen or so of missionaries. No peoples on earth seemed to me more abandoned."

His point of view must be clearly understood by those who are not of his religion. He was not a missionary: he was a monk, a hermit priest; he could give to the heathen the example of a life lived in the most literal acceptance of Christ's teaching; but the essential fact for him was that he, as a priest, could carry into these deserts the actual living presence of

Christ. The Sahara had now, under Cardinal Lavigerie's successor, become a separate diocese, and Father de Foucauld, as he now was, asked of the Bishop leave to establish in one of the French garrisons, where there was no priest, a little public oratory in which he might administer the sacraments.

"If you permit, I shall live there as chaplain of this humble oratory, without title and without stipend, living as a monk, following the Rule of St. Augustine, alone or with brethren, in prayer, in poverty, labour and works of charity, without preaching, or going abroad, except to administer the sacraments, in silence and in a cloister.

"My aim is to give spiritual aid to our soldiers, and above all to sanctify the unbelieving people by bringing among them Jesus present in the Holy Sacrament."

This will sound fantastic to many Europeans. But Charles de Foucauld knew that to the unbelieving peoples it would be easily intelligible: the natural life for a holy man. They would judge him by two things: his austerities and his charities.

The post to which he was directed was Beni Abbès, where he would be 400 kilometres from the nearest priest. When he set out on his

journey to the desert, surely no monk or priest ever had such a progress. All along the military railway the African army turned out at each station to welcome their old comrade in his new guise. It was strange enough: a white robe of the coarsest cloth that natives wear, but on his breast were stretched a cross and a heart, roughly cut out in red calico. At the rail-head the divisional general kept him two days as his guest. From the first the hermit preferred to travel on foot, but the officers insisted, and his courtesy could not refuse a mount on a trooper's horse with a party returning south. Half-way, at an oasis, was another post: its commander ordered out his native levies. "You shall see a French holy man who is coming out of friendship for you; treat him with honour." As the troop approached him, the old cavalryman put his horse to the gallop and came up towards them with his white robe flying in the wind, halted, and returned the officer's salute. Meanwhile the native troops, dismounting, surrounded the "marabout" and kissed the hem of his robe.

At the oasis, before the French of the garrison, he said mass, where no mass had been said since France occupied the territory; where probably no Christian priest had ever come.

That, to him, meant a great deal. By the end of November, 1901, he was installed at Beni Abbès, had bought some acres of desert, hillocks between which, in the depressions, grew a few palm trees, and had built a mud-walled chapel, native troopers helping. He slept in the chapel—it was no more than a long narrow shed—lying on the altar steps, till a sacristy was ready: this cell did not allow him to lie at full length, and he chose it should be so. Huts were built—one to receive the companion priest for whom he always hoped and who never came, then an infirmary, then a shelter for wayfarers. He marked out the limits of his enclosure with pebbles, and outside that would not set his foot except on duty. He lived on barley bread, a few dates, and what he called “desert tea”—the infusion of some herb. No European willingly ate twice at his board: the diet was not encouraging. The negroes whom from time to time he bought out of slavery worked for him, but they went elsewhere to get their meals. But he refused no man anything that he possessed. His day was mapped out—never four hours of unbroken sleep, prayer and meditation elaborately planned. Yet all his system was thrown aside when men came to his door. Soldiers came in the evenings

to converse with him, to hear his exposition of Scripture, to tell him their troubles, get him to write their letters; they found not a clergyman but a friend. Above all, in the strange costume that he wore there was none who did not recognise *un homme du meilleur monde*—a great gentleman with whom they were proud to be friends. In the morning, from five o'clock onwards, natives swarmed about him. They came from curiosity, they came to beg, and, welcome or unwelcome, they were received: he was at their disposal. But they recognised him for what he was—"a holy man." His precinct became a sanctuary: anything laid down inside his pebbled line was secure. He made no converts. Two or three of the slaves whom he ransomed (with money begged from his kindred) began their instruction, but soon turned away and left him. Only one old woman, sick and blind, actually received baptism after conversion, held to what she had undertaken, and adored him. Yet his mind was ceaselessly busy with plans for the spread of Christianity: he was in endless correspondence with whoever had power to help. All this was to him his duty: it stood between him and his delight, which was solitary meditation. The hours he gave to intercourse were



his pain, but he did not grudge them: he grudged nothing.

Another call seems to have appeared to him imperative. Without commission, without pay or recognition, he felt himself attached to the army, and, when any officer of importance visited the post, he came to the mess and joined in receiving him. It was part of his courtesy and part of his soldiership. On such occasions he was no kill-joy at the feast. If the talk was free, he simply did not hear it. If his opinion was asked where he was expert, for instance about Morocco, he was slow to give it. But when an urgent matter had to be considered—reprisals for a raid or the like—the soldier broke out: he joined hotly in the discussion.

In 1903 there came to Beni Abbès one who had served with him in the 4th Chasseurs, Henri Laperrine, already among the most noted chiefs in Saharan war and administrations. Friendship was renewed. Henceforward the two were constantly in correspondence, and to this soldier friend, exactly as to the Abbé Huvelin in Paris, Foucauld's restless spirit opened the project of a new adventure. At Beni Abbès one thing was lacking—danger. He was among tribes whose subjugation was

tolerably complete. Further south lay the wild peoples of the Touaregs; but their name had bloody associations for all who knew. They had killed out of hand the first two missionary groups sent out by Cardinal Lavigerie; they had cut off French military missions time and again. It was a great object for Christianity, and a great object for France, to humanise these barbarians. Laperrine, continually moving through the Sahara, seeking by personal contact to *apprivoiser*, to gentle in, all these peoples, recognised an ally. The Bishop would send no priest to risk himself among the Touaregs but he might permit a volunteer to adventure. The Abbé Huvelin approved; the Bishop asked time to consider. Then suddenly danger appeared even at Beni Abbès. The tribes were in ferment; convoys and posts were attacked; a large concentration was reported. Foucauld, judging the situation with a soldier's eye, concluded that Taghit, further north, where he had said his first mass in the Sahara, would be the point attacked, and petitioned to be sent there. They would not let him go, but he had been right. A month later fighting was reported again, and this time he insisted on seeking his place by the wounded. They gave him a horse to go alone. Some officers



protested. "I shall get through," he said. The head of the intelligence bureau confirmed him. "Yes, he'll get through. He can go where he likes unarmed; no one will touch him, he is sacred." He rode through the day and night, and, leaving the saddle after 120 kilometres' journey, he said his mass and went straight to the wounded men. There were forty-nine of them, men of the Foreign Legion and others—plenty of them "hard cases"; but all, by the testimony of an officer then on duty, received the communion from the hands of Father de Foucauld during the twenty-five days he was with them. He was among them all the time, except for the few hours given to sleep (never on a bed) and when he said mass or took his scanty meals.—By the end of the year these troubles were over, and the hermit returned to his project of the Touareg country. Travelling south with a convoy to join Laperrine, on foot himself, a she-ass carrying his chapel furniture, her foal running beside, he noted in a diary every detail of the road. Habit reasserted itself. Later, when such journeyings became a recurring feature of his life, he remarks that "travelling is bad for the spirit." This was why. It broke his meditation.

It was eighteen days' march, and each morning he said his mass under a tent. Then he joined Laperrine, who told him that three out of the six main clans of the Touaregs had decided for submission, and proposed that his friend should accompany him on a tour among them. Instantly Foucauld flung himself into study of Tamacheq, the Touareg language—a task which was to occupy him through the rest of his life. In March, 1904, Laperrine summoned him to start: this time he must ride a camel. At every stage notables of the Touaregs met them in palaver; everywhere the priest wrote down his topography, but with a new strategy in his mind—seeking always the points of vantage to establish mission-posts. And, instead of notes for the conduct of soldiers, he treats questions for a priest on such a journey. Should he, for instance, share the officers' mess?—He should dine alone “to save time for spiritual exercises and good works, to avoid the necessity of hearing blameable talk, to avoid diminishing respect for the priesthood by letting personal faults be known, and also to be the more readily approached by the poor.—But, if it be necessary for the good of souls, the missionaries shall dine with the officers.”—It is a counsel of perfection

perhaps: Charles de Foucauld gave no others. But who will deny that the ex-officer knew human nature?

After three months Laperrine returned to head-quarters at Insalah, but Foucauld, with a detachment under a junior officer, spent three months more moving slowly among the Hoggar clan, whose spears had been reddest with French blood. In January, 1905, he was back at Beni Abbès, and was of those who received there General Lyautey, already famous. The Marshal has written his recollections.

“We attended mass at the hermitage—a hut: its chapel a wretched long passage supported by pillars, thatched with reeds. A plank was the altar. The decorations were a calico sheet with a picture of Christ on it; two candlesticks on the altar. Our feet were deep in sand. Very well. I have never heard mass said as Father de Foucauld said it. I could have believed myself in the Thebaid. It is one of the things in my life which have most moved me.”

These long journeyings in the desert had left the hermit with shaken health: Beni Abbès was peace and rest. Yet his vocation urged

him. He was the only priest who knew the Touareg tongue; he would be the first to establish himself among them. Also, Laperrine pressed him. Both these men knew the natives of Northern Africa as few Europeans have known them: both desired, from their different standpoints, to press on the work of *apprivoisement* ("taming" is too brutal a word), to bring them within the scope of civilisation—and of France. Both recognised the value for this purpose of what the Touaregs would recognise as a holy man.

Yet it should be made clear that Charles de Foucauld did not act upon Laperrine's invitation, nor on his own instinct to accept it, without first pondering and carefully tabulating what could be said for and against. The considerations set down on either hand might be scarcely intelligible to an average man; but the average man would understand that there was careful and solid thought behind the decision. Secondly, obedient to his rule of obedience, he did not take that decision till it was authorised by those whom he regarded as having authority over him. They on their part, the Abbé Huvelin at Paris and the Bishop at his head-quarters in Algeria, had plainly come to consider that this man

must be allowed to follow his instinct wherever it led.

So in May, 1905, he set out. Four civilians were with the party—one a well-known Parisian journalist, who has noted that they laughed a little at Foucauld's "extraordinary passion for the desert." They called him the man "who could never be far enough from the tramways." They thought also that he was a saint "tinged with orientalism." Indeed it is true that Nazareth had coloured his mind; and it is far from Nazareth to Paris. On their route messengers came announcing a visit from Moussa, chief of the Hoggar clan. He accompanied the party for some days. Foucauld's study of Tamacheq enabled him to converse, and between them it was arranged that among the Hoggar should be his installation. He found his site at Taman-rasset, which he thus describes: "A village of twenty hearths, up in the mountains, away from all important centres. It seems there can never be a garrison, a telegraph post or a European established here: I chose this abandoned spot."

Captain Dinaux, who left him alone there, passed that way five weeks later to see if he were disposed to return. His official report tells that the priest asked "as a great favour" to be left where he was—alone among the

Touaregs, 700 miles from Insalah, connected with his people only by a monthly service of posts—not yet established. His report added:

“The Father’s reputation for sanctity, the cures of sick people which he has already accomplished, will do more to spread our influence and to rally men to our ideas than a permanent occupation of the country.”

Life changed now for the hermit. He must no longer enclose himself in arbitrary limits: he must seek contact with all classes. The fifty or sixty people settled in his village were half-bred negroes: the pure Touaregs, nomad herdsmen, only came and went. He must endeavour to gain their friendship, to induce them to come and visit him. Further than this he did not look; attempts to convert would destroy friendship, which must come first. But he was busy at translating extracts from Scripture into Tamacheq, and at constructing dictionary and grammar to bridge intercourse between the races. Of natural religion he was always ready and eager to speak.

Only one thing troubled him in his solitude—difficulties which arose from the very form of his religion. At sixty days’ journey from



the nearest priest, he held himself dispensed from the duty of confession. But to celebrate mass there was needed at least one worshipper to say the responses, and his ransomed slave Paul fulfilled this office. The boy left him, failed him; but, when celebration seemed impossible, there arrived out of the blue a wandering savant, Motylinski, seeking knowledge of Tamacheq. He had been an interpreter to the troops in 1882 when Foucauld was commanding his troop. Motylinski agreed to make the responses, although church-going had been long disused in his life. They grew friends. After three months the two set out together for the north: they passed through Beni Abbès, and thence Foucauld went to civilisation and the head-quarters of the Pères Blancs. When he returned south, after a few days, he had the desire of his heart—a companion brother. This was a young Breton, who had been three years a lay brother with the Pères Blancs, then three more in a Zouave regiment. Rail took them to within three days' march of Beni Abbès, where a hundred people were present in the chapel at midnight mass on Christmas Eve. For ten days they lived a communal life in the hermitage. They ate together with the negro servant who had been hired to tend the camels, from the

same dish, without cloth, plate, knife or fork. Before the New Year they were again on the road. The camels carried their provisions and furniture; the men marched in front. They held converse. The disciple asked his master how many pagan souls he had converted. "One," said the priest: "the old negress you saw at Beni Abbès." "Have you gained no more?" "Yes, it is true I baptised a child in danger of death, but he went to heaven almost immediately afterwards. I baptised a boy of thirteen, but he was not my convert; a French sergeant who brought him to me had taught him the catechism." This, justly enough, the Breton cites for proof of his humility—adding that by his outward dress he courted derision. His white robe was always soiled and torn. Of his charity he gives this instance. At the evening halt, when they were spent with sweat and fatigue, the elder would take off his burnous and throw it on the younger, while he himself shivered in his shirt. Yet what the ex-officer could stand broke down the Breton fisher boy, the ex-Zouave: he fell ill. Foucauld went on for the 700 kilometres before him, unspent.

One detail of their march together has a special charm. As they marched through the desert a troop of gazelles halted to gaze, a long



way off; one of the camel troopers tried a shot and brought down his game. There was great applause, a great festival in camp that night; and that night Father de Foucauld, who never ate meat at other times, shared in the feasting. Was not that the fine instinct of a gentleman—and a sportsman? He never drank wine, and he told the Breton that on no conditions could it be permitted. But later at Tamanrasset, whenever Laperrine arrived in passing, he would come in to join the mess and bring a bottle from the store of wine which he kept for use at his mass. They protested that he would run himself short: but no, he insisted; and at the end of the meal each man drank a glass of the white muscatel. It was part of Christianity, as he conceived it, to be companionable—to be merry.

For the good are always merry,  
Save by an evil chance,  
And the merry love the fiddle,  
And the merry love to dance.

He would have approved that verse from the "Fiddler of Dooney." It should be noted, too, that part of his work on Tamacheq was to collect the songs of the people among whom

his lot was cast—not merely for literary or grammatical curiosity. It was to make their spirit known to those with whom he laboured to unite them.

As the years went by, his companionship with the tribesmen grew closer and more intimate. Finally, in 1913, he decided to bring with him to France the son of their chief. Some years earlier he had, under pressure from many, revisited his country and his kindred, who furnished him with what money he needed for his work; but it was barely a visit. He flew back to his work, travelling as the poorest of the poor. But when he came with a guest they travelled as his hospitality dictated; and, he hurried nothing. He took his young African from house to house of his own people; he showed him France at its best. Then he went back to his solitude, to his labour, and to his privations.

But the lack which had cost him most was ended. In 1906, after the Breton lad broke down, he went on a prolonged journey through the country which he called his parish—some two thousand kilometres east to west, one thousand from north to south—and he meditated whether, after all, he should fix himself at Insalah, the administrative centre, or go

back to Tamanrasset, where lacking one to serve, he must deny himself the mass. Yet it was there he could be most of service, because most alone. There, *il y a de l'action*—something gets done. Cut off from his own, a man becomes part of the country where he lives. He went back: months passed, Christmas passed, the New Year passed, and he could not celebrate. But at the end of January word came that the Pope had given dispensation: he could celebrate alone. Does one need to be religious to understand his cry of exultation?

I have tried to present from his own standpoint the man who was this ascetic priest. There are sidelights, too, in M. Bazin's book. There is the account given by Major Hérissou, the medical inspector whom he counselled to be always laughing. He describes the journeyings with Laperrine. If possible, Foucauld would take a route of his own, and at the day's end come in with a sheaf of notes and sketches, which he handed over to the colonel. He describes his intercourse with the Touaregs, and this trait in particular. Five or six of the Hoggar nobles, with their chief and his cousin, were in discourse at the hermitage. The chief and his cousin rose at the stated hour and, drawing their blue veils about their faces,

addressed themselves to prayer. The others went on with their talk. Father de Foucauld interrupted them. "How about you?" he asked. "Do you not say your prayer?" They accepted his rebuke, and rose at his bidding to pay honour to God after the fashion that they knew.

"Father de Foucauld," said Major Hérisson, "unlike other men, seemed infinitely greater the nearer you came to him."

But there is more living sense of the man to be gathered through his friend. In 1908, he had fallen gravely ill. Laperrine wrote to the Superior of the Pères Blancs, to say he was uneasy.

"He feels tired. When he owns up to that, and asks me for condensed milk, he must be really ill. . . . The situation would incline me to go East and come back through the Hoggar country; but I will sleep on de Foucauld's letter and possibly will go round by the Ahaggar or send a doctor, if he gets worse. I mean to chaff him and take your name as authority for telling him that penances going up to progressive suicide are not allowed. . . ."

Again:

"He is better: the Touaregs looked after him well. I've sent him a telling-off, for I

am very sure that his exaggerated penances account for most of his weakness, and that overwork on his dictionary has done the rest. Since the telling-off could not do all the business, we have added three camel-loads of provisions. Besides, he knew that he had to slow down his regimen of boiled barley, since he is asking for milk. Anyhow, I think that at his next return to the North you must certainly throw grapnels on him and keep him a month or two to get up his hump, if you will excuse a Sahara phrase." (If a camel's hump is flaccid it is not fit to march.)

Four months later from Tamanrasset:

"I have been a week with de Foucauld. He is quite well, shining with health and gaiety. He came to meet me, and arrived in my camp, galloping like a sub-lieutenant, at the head of a group of Touaregs."

Then comes detail about the hermit's "enormous work on Tamacheq," which "will be exceedingly thorough."—It was published, the earlier part as an appendix to posthumous work of Motylinski; but he would allow none of it to be signed.

So much for days before the flood. In 1913, when de Foucauld brought his young Touareg to France, Laperrine, now a general, was at Lyons and insisted on taking the guest to see the Alps. Then came 1914. Beni Abbès was now only a place of occasional visits; the hermit's true home was among the Hoggar. There, on July 31, his diary noted that he had reached page 385 of his Touareg-French dictionary; on August 31, page 550; and it notes nothing else. But on September 3 an express had come in with news of Germany's action, and of consequent military movements in the Sahara. There was an order to Moussa, the friendly Touareg chief, to get a troop together. The hermit immediately took charge—saw to the despatch of the troop that evening. All the notes which follow are written by a soldier. Yet on September 30: "This evening, page 700 of the dictionary." By October 10 he had news of the Marne—"une grande victoire qui paraît décisive." Five days later the country about him was beginning to rise. He was asked to take shelter in the nearest fortified post; but:

"My duty is plainly to stay here to help to keep the population calm. I shall not leave Tamanrasset till peace is made."



Yet he had heart-searchings, and wrote them, not now to his ecclesiastical superior, but to Laperrine.

"Should I not be more useful on the front as chaplain or stretcher-bearer? Unless you tell me to come, I stay here: if you say come, I start at once, and travel pretty fast."

Two months later he got his reply: Stay. Staying there, he did his duty to France by reporting to the army, through Laperrine, all that he knew and thought about his corner of the military situation. German agents were busy through the Sahara and the Sudan. Trouble began in February, 1915, south of Tripoli. By the end of the year it had spread to Tunisia. But in March, 1916, he could note the establishment of wireless at the neighbouring fort—Fort Motylinski, thirty miles from Taman-rasset. "These works show the natives that nothing has changed in France, that France carries on the war easily and without disquiet." That was also the impression which his own presence was designed to convey. Morally he was happy about the war. He believed (as did Laperrine) that "great good for souls would come out of this great evil."—"For the first time I really understand the Crusades."

On April 11, a longer letter. A fort having fallen on the Tripolitan frontier, the Senoussists had an open road to Fort Motylinski. He had advised withdrawal to an impregnable position in the mountains, and was in daily communication with the commander of the fort—a second lieutenant. “If he is attacked I will join him.” But meanwhile a fort was being constructed at Tamanrasset, under Father de Foucauld’s direction. He moved into it, with his chapel furniture and his few belongings. This is how he wrote to General Mazel, a friend of St. Cyr days (“My batch at St. Cyr is doing good service to the country,” he wrote in his diary. “Mazel, d’Urbal and Pétain were in it”):

“MY DEAR MAZEL—Our Touaregs here are loyal, but we might be attacked by the Tripolitans. I have turned my hermitage into a fortress: nothing is new under the sun, and when I look at my breastworks I think of the fortified convents and churches of the tenth century. They have trusted me with six boxes of cartridges and thirty Gras carbines, which recall my youth.”

By October the Senoussist movement had seduced away some of the Hoggar clan. His



work went on: he was copying for the press the Touareg poems. "Strange work in such a time," he notes. Really, his task was the hardest of all: waiting—for what came. In December, 1916, a raiding band of about a score near Tamanrasset knew that arms were there, and thought that the priest would be a valuable hostage. But to get in they needed a traitor. They found him—one of de Foucauld's daily visitors, who knew the pass-words. And so the gate was opened without resistance. The hermit was tied up and propped against the wall while the place was ransacked. At this moment two soldiers, passing through Tamanrasset, came up as usual to pay their respects to the marabout. Fire was opened: they dropped; but a man at the gate, hearing the volley, put his rifle to the captive's head and pulled the trigger. There was no cry or word: gradually the corpse sank down. He had his will: for many passages in his journals and letters prove that he aspired to death by violence. That he should be betrayed would undoubtedly have been welcome to his strange nature: it completed that imitation of Christ which was his life's work.

Soldier and Frenchman, he died uncertain of the war's issue: Christian priest among the

unbelievers, he died without converts made. Yet assuredly he was in his heart convinced that by such means he might make ready the way for others; and he asked no more, he refused to desire more.

It would be treachery, however, to write of his work as Frenchman and as soldier without putting this on record. He hoped to see in Northern Africa *une France prolongée* (an extension of France), but he believed this possible only on one condition. Six months before his death he wrote:

“My thought is that if the Moslems of our Colonial Empire in the North of Africa are not gradually, gently, little by little, converted, there will be a national movement like that in Turkey: an intellectual *élite* will form itself in the big towns, trained in the French fashion, but French neither in mind nor heart, lacking all Moslem faith. but keeping the name of it to be able to influence the masses, who remain ignorant of us, alienated from us by their priests and by our contact with them, too often very unfit to create affection. In the long run the *élite* will use Islam as a lever to raise the masses against us. The population is now thirty millions: thanks to peace, it will double in fifty

years. It will have railways, all the plant of civilisation, and will have been trained by us to the use of our arms. If we have not made Frenchmen of these peoples, they will drive us out. The only way for them to become French is by becoming Christian."

The more one knows and thinks about Africa—and other non-European countries—the more formidable such a reflection of such a man appears. But by a Christian he did not mean a monk: he meant someone like Laperrine.

That survivor of the friendship was back in the Sahara in 1917, and in December visited Tamanrasset. He lifted Charles de Foucauld's remains from the hastily-dug grave where they had been placed, and buried them again on the summit of a hillock near where the hermitage had been. No inscription was set on the tomb but a great cross in black wood, visible all over the plain, was raised there. The Arab soldiers who fell with him were buried at his feet. A strange thing was noted. Foucauld's corpse had mummified and was still recognisable: the hands were bound behind the back, the body was kneeling. It was shrouded so, and so buried. But of the Arabs buried near him there remained only a little dust. One

of the native soldiers who dug them out wondered at Laperrine's wonder. "It is not surprising, since he was a great marabout."

Laperrine passed on his road, saw the war to its end, the Sahara again at peace, and in February, 1920, sought to cross it in a new way. The aeroplane rose with him from Tamanrasset to carry him to Senegal, but lost direction in a haze and crashed in the desert. Laperrine died of his injuries, and his body was brought back to Tamanrasset wrapped in a web of the aeroplane's wings. There they buried him in the grave which he had chosen for the other; and so, priest by layman, soldier by soldier, friend by friend, they lie in the Sahara where their so diverse work drew them, and where out of their work their friendship grew into one of those examples which the world can ill afford to forget.

THE GENERAL OF  
THE SAHARA



## II

### THE GENERAL OF THE SAHARA

AT Tamanrasset, in the very centre of the Sahara, two European graves lie together, each with its separate monument; death brought these friends closer together even than life did: it sealed the bond. Charles de Foucauld is known by now to many thousands outside France and outside the communion of his Church; and nobody can know the story of Charles de Foucauld without knowing at least a little of General Laperrine. If ever the world saw a martyr, de Foucauld was one; and it was Laperrine, his closest friend, who urged him to face martyrdom; it is due to Laperrine that we are not sure whether de Foucauld was a martyr for the Church or for France. They belonged to the same order of chivalry. One living in the world, involved in all the innumerable relations that link up a successful soldier in a modern army to varying grades of society, the other out of the



world as far as is possible for a human being, they went their separate ways, consciously in touch, and consciously working together for common ends. Laperrine's methods and purposes had in them nothing mystical, yet his career and fate were hardly less romantic than his friend's; and to follow them is to read a little in the epic story of France's enormous African adventure.

Born at Castelnaudary in 1860, Laperrine was two years younger than de Foucauld and was his junior at the cavalry school; the men met first when posted to the 4th Chasseurs d'Afrique, and they took part together in a campaign in the south of the province of Oran. At that time French occupation did not reach beyond a few marches from the coast. Laperrine left the Chasseurs d'Afrique to join the *spahis*—Algerian native cavalry. But France in those years was marking time in Algeria; at every attempt to penetrate the desert, bloody reverses inflicted by the Touaregs checked her enterprise: the forward movement was elsewhere. By 1889 Laperrine was with a squadron of cavalry in Senegal and took his full part in the fighting which steadily conquered inwards till the navigable Senegal was connected with the Upper Niger, and the railway planned.

He won the Legion of Honour in 1892. Next year Timbuctoo became a French possession, and the occupation of this city brought France on her new line of penetration once more up against the masters of the desert. The need for swiftly moving troops became redoubled, and a force of *spahis soudanais* was recruited. Laperrine was a captain in it. But the need for a new type of cavalry in the regions north of Timbuctoo was soon disclosed, and by 1897 Laperrine was commanding a squadron of *spahis sahariens* mounted on *méharis*, the swift dromedaries. He had found his vocation. All that he accomplished for France was achieved through the organisation of camel troopers. In 1899 he was posted to a home regiment; yet a non-commissioned officer, having won his commission by gallantry in the Soudan Français, applied to be attached to the *spahis sahariens* in order to be under Laperrine, who was then in France. "But," said the ex-troop-sergeant, "they will have to send him to the Sahara. He is the only man for it."

Soldiers who knew Africa knew before 1900 that the Sahara needed a man. France had pushed on with a furious energy from Senegal, from the Ivory Coast, and from the Congo: Marchand's exploit of reaching the Nile with a

gunboat across the heart of Africa so nearly brought England and France into collision that it is better known than a score of other expeditions hardly less amazing of accomplishment. Yet at the gates of the Sahara France stood terrified. The desert, with its waterless tracts and its sand-storms, made a tremendous obstacle; and the Touaregs, who moved at will through it, knew neither fear nor pity, and seemed unconquerable. Pierre Benoit, the novelist, added a literary halo to this sinister prestige by his romance, *L'Atlantide*; the Sahara was pictured as a Moloch ready to consume the rash adventurer "in the brazier of its disdainful embrace." And so, although a special force of Saharan troops had been created in 1894 for the Algerian province, the *tirailleurs sahariens* and *spahis sahariens* effected nothing: they were kept simply at garrison duty in a couple of blockhouses. In 1898 all the *méharis* of the *spahis* were carried off from the pasturage outside the fort by a group of Touareg raiders.

There were, however, officers who saw and said that timid policy was futile and unnecessary. One of them was Foureau, who carried out seven journeys south into the Sahara before he was finally appointed to take joint charge with Lamy of an expedition that should cross

the desert to Lake Tchad, and there join hands with two other missions—one proceeding from the Congo, the other from the Niger. Each of the three parties met with difficulties almost insuperable and sustained grave losses; but they accomplished their triple object and, joining forces at last in the spring of 1900, crushed the marauding usurper, Rabeh, the most formidable native power in Africa. At that period Laperrine was in France; he had no hand in the conquest of Lake Tchad, which French colonial ideals represented as the converging point of all their African possessions. His work was to lie in making this aspiration a reality. Foureau and Lamy got through, but they left no more impression on the Sahara than a passing ship on the ocean. From the fall of Rabeh onwards, France could reach Lake Tchad at will from the Congo or from the Niger: the French territories in West Africa were not disturbed by any war after 1900. Conquest pushed out steadily from the Tchad basin through all the regions where water was freely procurable and the population was settled. Touch was maintained steadily from the West Coast to the heart of Africa. But from the north the French had only the most illusory claims to occupation of the hinterland.

When Foureau and Lamy disappeared from sight in October, 1898, they were not heard of for eighteen months, yet no attempt was made to send even a reconnaissance in quest of them.

There was indeed some small activity in 1899. Insalah was occupied, at the eastern end of the chain of oases which runs to Figuig on the Moorish frontier. But the Saharan front was still a stationary occupation of posts, and the Touaregs showed their contempt by attacks on these strongholds. The initiative lay with them, till in July, 1901, Laperrine, as his old subordinate had foreseen three years earlier, was fetched back to become commandant of the Saharan oases.

Laperrine's biographers indicate the results of this new command by citing a single fact. In 1904 a French scientist was provided by Laperrine with an escort of camel troops who conveyed him across the Sahara until he could be handed on to a similar party coming from Timbuctoo. The only hitch in the arrangement was that the southern party arrived late and Laperrine's men, running short of provisions, were obliged to return, leaving the scientist in charge of a Touareg camp till the Soudanese troopers could take him over.

The means by which this transformation was accomplished was, first, a complete military reorganisation. Everywhere else in Africa France had accomplished extraordinary things by the use of native troops trained to European discipline. Her *tirailleurs sénégalais* had gone everywhere and done everything. But as well ask infantry to operate on the sea as in the Sahara. French official military organisation had taken no account of this: every official military organisation seems to be the same. General Lyautey about the same time was beginning his official career—to which Laperrière's is complementary—and on the Moorish frontier he reviewed an African battalion whose commanding officer proudly paraded them in full European marching order, passing the saluting point with the regularity of Prussian or English guards. Lyautey looked at them and said, "Get the weight off these men. No boots. Sandals. I want them African." The commanding officer applied for a transfer, and got it; but Lyautey got troops living as near as might be to African conditions.

Laperrine in the Sahara carried the same policy to its extreme conclusion. He abolished the infantry altogether; that was not enough: he cleared out all African elements from the force



except men born and bred in the desert, and then he divided his force into companies which were irregular to the last degree. For these nomads a long term of engagement is like a prison, and Laperrine left every trooper free to cancel his enlistment at a moment's notice, but equally liable to be dismissed. He made them provision, arm, and ration themselves, and mount themselves on their own *méhari*. Each company had its own system of supply; it bought like a co-operative store, and supplied to its members what they needed at cost price, deducting the charge from their pay. It advanced the price of their mounts—for each trooper was bound to have two dromedaries. Laperrine knew that the desert tribes reckoned that, for French or for Touareg, there must be a period of immobility after each raid till their animals recovered. The Saharan companies had to be able to strike again instantly in a new direction after they regained their base where the spare mounts were guarded.

Nobody in the desert could have weight of numbers; a few hundreds were the most that could be rationed. But you could double the numbers by doubling the mobility. A company consisted of six officers and about 400 men, of whom ten per cent. were French.



These French volunteers from the army had to engage for six years' service, and they joined as privates, whatever their previous grade. Each company had its central base and headquarters reserve; the rest of the men were divided into three groups, each with its local base, from which patrols radiated outwards over an immense distance, so that one company policed a region half as large as France. They were eternally on the march, hunting down those who interfered with the passage of caravans; or, if they heard rumours of a raid preparing, attacking before the hostile *rezzou* could be got together.

But no trooper in the Sahara rode so many hundred miles as Laperrine. One of his officers writes: "He was never completely himself till his bare foot was on the supple neck of his dromedary." Towns and ceremonies and the whole atmosphere of officialdom he detested, saying that if he had to choose between a sandstorm in the desert and an hour's waiting in a minister's antechamber he would take the sandstorm. Yet even in the desert he was punctiliously the European. His officers could wear the *burnous* if they liked, or dress like Touaregs: he was tolerant of such caprices; but his own wear was the tunic and regulation

*képi*—always a little on one side. The very charming photograph in his Life shows him so, with the tunic loose cut, but having a cavalryman's style about it; his figure thin and light, his hawk-nosed face thin, too, under the blond beard and long moustache trained upwards; and his eyes with deep lines about them, suggesting the power to blaze suddenly or to fill with twinkling laughter. He was a southern from Provence, and words came tumbling from his pen, as we can read—and by all testimony they came from his lips even quicker—in amusing disarray: slang, execrations, ironies, stories, by preference not proper, garnishing his discourse—with eternal variation on the theme of officialdom. He was one of the great irregulars—a man after Charles Napier's pattern, gayer, but with the same contempt for ease, the same passion for work, and the same contempt for formal inefficiency. After ten hours on horseback or camelback in the Sahara he would dismount; his table must be set at once; a cup of tea, and then he fell to studying the mails which had reached him at his appointed destination, and to getting out his despatches, which must go off at once. He was terribly punctual; and he saw to it that his couriers must be able to come and go. That was the

effective conquest—pacification, keeping the roads clear. But when officialdom ordained, for instance, in the later stages of his command, that a motor road should be constructed, he notes: "The non-commissioned officers charged with constructing a motor track in the Sahara had been given a course of instruction (very well planned and thought out) for the method of establishing a colonial light railway." Also they were hurried. "It was not really a question of making a motor track, but of enabling the Commander-in-Chief and the Governor-General to motor through on the 1st of December. At certain points the track was laid in the bed of dry watercourses, knowing that when the courses filled up all would be swept away; provided it did not happen till December 15th, that made no matter." These are extracts from an official report, in which discipline does not permit him to go beyond irony. But his private correspondence was not so discreet when he commented on the fact that one company store had been rationed with 7,130 boxes of matches and 49 packets of cigarettes; or again when he proposed establishing a poultry run and pigeon-loft at one of the desert blockhouses, and officialdom demanded a strict account of the

hatch of chickens, the number of eggs consumed, of eggs set, of rations issued to the poultry. "The very most they would spare us was a *procès-verbal* of each hen-slaughtering, checked and countersigned by the quartermaster."

Anybody who remembers Napier's letters and diaries (and what else is better worth remembering?) will recognise a kindred nature. Yet the essential part of Laperrine's work did not lie in his military competence. As a condition of achieving what he aimed at, there was need of a force which could show the desert peoples that France could meet them on their own ground, and that the Sahara must be free of passage to France's agents, officers, and citizens. But his aim was to make friends: not to crush, but to pacify; and the crucial proof of this is the use he made of de Foucauld.

By coincidence of destiny the ex-Hussar, ex-Trappist, was ordained priest in June, 1901, to take up his self-imposed mission; Laperrine was appointed to command the oases in July of that year. At Beni-Abbas, where was a body of French troops to whom he served as chaplain, Foucauld had been established for eighteen months in the monastery of which he was the sole monk, when in March, 1903, Laperrine

came to see him and confided to the priest his projects. Those were to link up, in a military sense, the northern occupation, whose southernmost point was Insalah, with the southern bases in Timbuctoo and the posts radiating up from Lake Tchad. Charles de Foucauld had a corresponding ambition: to carry Christian teaching by example through that part of Africa where only the Moslem religion was known. From that meeting in 1903 they were in constant correspondence; and the first subject is curious. After the massacre of the Flatters mission, a Touareg woman of noble family saved and sheltered some of the wounded, and finally got them back to the coast. Laperrière wrote to her. De Foucauld proposed to go on foot to carry her thanks and blessings. She was a woman of the Hoggar tribe, most dreaded of all the Touareg peoples. Laperrine approved the project. "You may not get dogmas accepted, but you may show Christian morality and diffuse it by example and daily contact."

In the close of 1903 the priest sought and obtained leave to go and found, if opportunity offered, another cell in the extreme south. In the beginning of 1904 he set out and joined Laperrine at Adrar, 400 miles to

the south of Beni-Abbas, and only half that distance from Timbuctoo. He learnt there that three of the six important tribes had given in their submission, of whom the Hoggar counted most. Laperrine proposed to take his friend on a tour through the countries that had submitted and in the meanwhile set him to studying the Touareg language, which scarcely any European knew. We have the priest's impression of this journey: *vraie tournée épiscopale* (a bishop's peaceful visitation), seeking to give confidence and friendship, and to *apprivoiser*. That was always Laperrine's word for his work, and it means "to tame." But the French have two words for taming: *dompter* is used for wild beasts, *apprivoiser* is taming by gentleness—birds, for example.

There had been fighting, of course, before this episcopal visitation could take place. One of Laperrine's lieutenants, Collenest, with his Saharan troop, had inflicted defeat on the Hoggar, and driven out the chief under whom the Flatters mission was destroyed. Laperrine had named a new man, Moussa, to be chief in his place.

That journey lasted five months. It failed in Laperrine's primary object. He proposed to establish contact with the Soudan. But



on the road a French detachment from the Niger met him with sharp orders to return. Jealousy had been roused. One of the submitting Touareg tribes lay so far south that the Soudan Government held that the submission should have been made to them. Laperrine had to turn back, and de Foucauld heard with amazement French troops derisively hooting their comrades. Four years had to elapse before the authorities commanding in the south came to Laperrine's outposts asking for an arrangement to link their patrols. That was in 1908. What Laperrine achieved in 1904 was contact between de Foucauld and the Hoggar tribes, and the application of that strenuous brain to a study of the unknown language. Next year he was urging his friend to another journey. On this tour de Foucauld met Moussa, and his installation in the Hoggar was decided. Laperrine had secured at the vital spot an ally whose value this soldier had the imaginative power to estimate.

What actually happened? In 1905 the hermit fixed on Tamanrasset as the loneliest spot he could find. Within two years Moussa was establishing his capital there, increasing the area of fields and gardens, and setting up a market. Laperrine's object was to increase



the sedentary population, to settle these nomads: de Foucauld was preaching that for him, Moussa was putting it in practice. Further, the student was busy already on a dictionary of the language: henceforward, when he accompanied Laperrine on journeys, which happened repeatedly, he acted as interpreter. Coming to know the Touareg life as no other European had known it, he was consulted on matters of policy; his information was given by regular correspondence. The two men, the Christian monk and the soldier, wanted the same thing: they wanted peace. Laperrine, it appears from M. Bazin's *Life of de Foucauld*, was not a practising Catholic. Yet he was in full sympathy with his friend, and it was he who transmitted to the hermit the Pope's authorisation to say mass even alone. He believed undoubtedly in the efficacy of the monk's example; and courtesy, generosity, and kindness were his own daily practice.

It was the strangest alliance. Laperrine was the gayest of talkers, with an amazing repertory of anecdotes, and often when everybody else was convulsed with laughter the monk would be seen smiling: or, if the story went a little beyond the limits, he would simply shut down the windows of his mind. Often enough,

when de Foucauld was not of the company, Laperrine's recital would regale his hearers with recollections of de Foucauld's stormy youth: it afforded rich material, and he denied himself and his company nothing of the piquancy of that contrast. But a close observer, Dr. Hérisson, who accompanied the two on one of their long expeditions *d'apprivoisement*, notes that over and above the mutual affection and esteem which they showed to each other, Laperrine always kept up a shade of professional deference to the old cavalry officer, his senior at Saint-Cyr. More than that, he gave this friend his most confidential thought. In 1910, when the War Office transferred him to France, he knew the professional risks involved by this transfer but went willingly. De Foucauld wrote: "He thinks, and rightly, that no man should seem to cling to any office."

No other judgment on Laperrine's work is so valuable as this friend's, for the soldier monk never ceased to have a soldier's instincts: the problems of a military administration were never out of his mind.

"Laperrine spends his energy without stint: he has given admirable fire and activity to his

whole command: the work which officers under his orders have accomplished is incredible, from the point of view of military, administrative, geographical, or commercial development. It is he who has given France the Sahara, in spite of France, at the risk of his career, and it is he who has linked up our Algerian possessions with our colony of the Soudan."

That was true in 1910, and remained true for three years: the work of cementing the links needed time; but Laperrine must have known, as de Foucauld knew, that one chance might undo the work—a European war. When that came, everything else of France's work in Africa stood: all the sedentary populations from the Senegal to the Congo remained undisturbed by rumours or by propaganda. In Morocco French troops were engaged in conquest on the grand scale along the whole line of the Atlas: Marshal Lyautey refused to accept the instruction which would have recalled him and his to the coast, but he sent back thirty French battalions. Black Africa furnished him the men to replace them and, while France was locked in the death-grapple at home, the Moroccan conquest went on.

The effect was, as Lyautey foresaw, felt throughout the desert. For more than a year there was no active disorder in the French Sahara. De Foucauld had consulted Laperrine, not his ecclesiastical superiors, as to his duty at this moment; and if Laperrine, then commanding a division, had said, "Come," no ecclesiastical superior could, I think, have stopped the monk on his way to some chaplain's or stretcher-bearer's post. But Laperrine wrote, "Stay"; and de Foucauld stayed, working at his dictionary and his collection of Touareg folksong, and maintaining the impression that France was still unshaken everywhere.

But in the Tripolitan hinterland Italy had withdrawn largely to the coast, and the effect of withdrawal was what Lyautey had foreseen: the desert attacked what garrisons were left, drove them in, captured rifles and even quick-firing guns, and attacked French territory. The Saharan companies did their best, but the tide was too strong. In December, 1916, an advance wave of it reached to Tamanrasset, and de Foucauld was killed in the hermitage which he had turned into an undefended fort. When this news reached France, the step taken shows what the official view was of de Foucauld's

relation to Laperrine. Moussa, amenokal of the Hoggar, was still for France: he had been, at Laperrine's suggestion, entertained in France as a public guest: he knew what France was. Ouksem, chief of the Dag Rali clan of the Hoggar, had also been in France, as the guest of de Foucauld and his kinsfolk: he also was constant. And de Foucauld's influence exerted on the spot kept these men steady: they came to him constantly for counsel. When de Foucauld was murdered, France decided that Laperrine must go back to the Sahara.

He went back with the unity of command theoretically established, having military authority over all the desert regions. But the war was now in all quarters: the nomads were beating like a tide, as they had always done, on the settled regions, behind Tunisia, behind Algeria, behind Oran on the north; they were threatening from the western flank the long line of posts strung out southwards. From the east and from the centre, bands of Senoussists assailed occupied posts on the great caravan route from Tripoli and Egypt towards Lake Tchad and the old Fulah emirates of Kano and Sokoto. Agadès, north-east of Lake Tchad, Zinder, north-west of it, were menaced. Laperrine's command included all these, but its

unity was only theoretical: the Algerian troops, the Niger troops, the troops in the Tchad basin were in part under him, in part under the local Governors. His own Saharan force had gone to pieces. European war had drawn away many of his best officers, and had cut off the supply of men in the ranks ambitious for a career; it had become no longer possible to make knowledge of Arabic a necessary qualification for a non-commissioned officer. The European soldier in the Sahara was once more operating in a country known to the natives, not known to him.

So the General of the Sahara had once more to spend himself, and more lavishly than ever: reorganising troops, reorganising administration, above all travelling ceaselessly, making his presence felt; and he won. But the war in the Sahara did not finish with the European armistice. Pacification was not complete till 1919. In the close of that year Laperrine was withdrawn and put in command of the Algerian division. But the problems at which he had been working still remained unsolved. His first and chief task had been to reorganise camel transport and supply—to replace the worn-out stud. But the camel could at best give European troops equal mobility with the desert



peoples: Europe needed an assured supremacy if the pacification was to be complete and permanent. From 1915 onwards constant attempts had been made to introduce motor transport, and the desert had beaten these efforts. Sand, perpetually shifting, made it impossible to establish a solid track: violent variations of temperature, intolerable sun by day, fierce frost by night, broke up the machinery and destroyed the tyres. Wireless telegraphy was of service, but not sufficient. Only the air was still untried. In the opening of 1920 a squadron of aeroplanes was organised to undertake the crossing and reconnaissance of the Sahara, reporting on its topography by observation and by the camera.

General Nivelle, then commanding-in-chief at Algiers, laid it down definitely that this was only a step to a definite end: the trans-Saharan rail. During the war, he said, the Soudan could supply nothing to France: its products piled up in the port at Dakar for lack of sea-transport. The Sahara railway would make all France's African possessions available on a Mediterranean shore. When the expedition was organised, Nivelle himself designed to accompany it: he actually set out from Algiers, but his machine returned with engine trouble, and,



before he could re-start, a telegram called the general to Paris. The honour passed on to Laperrine. By motor he joined the squadron at Biskra, and they flew by stages to Ouargla, to Insalah, and to Tamanrasset. Yet before they left Insalah two machines of the five had been broken in a sandstorm. For the flight from Tamanrasset to the Niger only two were detailed: Laperrine went on one of them as passenger.

The track had been laid out and marked by every possible device, and along it posts were stationed at intervals, linked by camel patrols. Major Vuillemin, a senior officer of the Air Force, was in command, and by his orders Sergeant-Major Bernard, pilot of the second machine, was to follow his course. They rose on February 18 from Tamanrasset, following the track; but the mist thickened to a fog of sand, and Vuillemin, abandoning the track, steered by compass. Bernard, provided with petrol only for five hours, found himself, near noon, with no post in sight and only petrol for another half-hour. He tried to reach his leader by wireless: the signals did not get through, and there was no choice but to land. On the unstable soil the machine sank in, then went over. The pilot extricated himself

unhurt; the mechanic was bruised; General Laperrine had two ribs driven in and a knee damaged. They had come down in a region of great sand dunes with no recognisable landmark, but they supposed the patrol track to be some thirty miles distant. Next morning they set out in search of it, fully provisioned. Laperrine marched with great difficulty. A day's journey brought them no clue. They dragged on for a second day, and still no mountain range showed: only the high hummocks of sand. Then Laperrine decided to make back to the machine, on which search-parties would direct themselves. The march back was a purgatory. After these four days of effort came endless waiting and despairing. The two younger men planned a march of their own. Laperrine agreed to their going, but warned them; and within a mile they fell exhausted and returned. On the seventeenth day the general died quietly. Ten more days passed, and one of the search-parties which had been scouring the desert came on the two survivors, half-crazed with thirst. Laperrine, dying earlier, had been spared that torture; but their impression was that he had deliberately let himself die so as to economise the ration of water.

They report his last saying, whispered into their ears when he could hardly speak: "Boys, people think they know the Sahara; they think I know it. Nobody knows it. I crossed it ten times, and at the eleventh it has me."

No sea was ever so estranging, so lonely, so trackless as the desert, even in 1920. Aeroplanes and wireless could not break down its isolation. Motor lorries which set out from Tamanrasset at the first suspicion of disaster took three days to cover three hundred kilometres of the prepared track, and could not leave it at all. Two years later the Citroën caterpillar cars went to Timbuctoo easily, averaging two hundred kilometres a day, going where they chose: the Sahara had ceased to be a barrier. Laperrine's fate illustrated tragically how little use was aviation unless ground transport could be developed to supply its necessities; but every development of land-passage multiplies manifold the possibilities of the air. It may well be that France's roll of tragic losses in the Sahara is closed with the name of that Frenchman who came nearest to personal conquest of the desert.

Yet compassion for Laperrine is suspended by a sense of dramatic fitness. After all, he had seen the Great War won; he had tamed the

tribes of the Sahara; he fell in the endeavour to defeat the desert itself. And for a consummating touch fate marked out inevitably the place of his memorial. When the rescue party had restored the two survivors, their care turned itself towards the little mound of sand which these men had heaped over the general's body. Disinterred and placed on a bier, constructed from the tubing and wing-webs of the broken aeroplane, the remains were carried ten days' journey to Tamanrasset; and there, at the post to which Laperrine had guided de Foucauld, where he had bidden de Foucauld to stand fast, where de Foucauld had fallen, and where in course of time Laperrine had raised his monument, now Laperrine himself was laid. I do not think that any country can show two more knightly figures of modern times; and certainly between them they illustrate the range of diverging genius that springs from the land and from the spirit which, in their union, we call France.

A DON



### III

#### A DON

IN 1883 or 1884 a group of figures entering the Radcliffe Square at Oxford made a lasting mark on my mind. Mark Pattison, Rector of Lincoln, drawn in a bath-chair by a shambling menial, lay more like a corpse than any living thing I have ever seen. And yet there was a singular vitality behind that parchment-covered face: something powerful and repellent. Beside him walked his wife, small, erect, and ultra Parisian: all in black with a black parasol—I did not know then how often Frenchwomen thus enhance the brilliance of a personality: still less did I know how few but Frenchwomen could do it. But there, plain to be seen for the least accustomed eyes, was the gift of style. No less plainly, her presence conveyed detachment from her convoy with an emphasis that absence could never have given. Either of these two figures alone would have arrested even the least observant eye: together, they



presented dramatically the spectacle of an amazing marriage to which the world's attention had already been called.

For its incongruity had already tempted two novelists—and one of them a novelist of genius—to use these two figures as material, without stopping to consider what is due to a friend or to a host. Or, perhaps one should say, the domestic life of this great scholar roused such feelings in George Eliot and in Rhoda Broughton that they produced in fiction most unkindly studies of the man at whose table they had often sat—under whose auspices, indeed, they had been received in Oxford society. Miss Broughton, who lived in Oxford, knew well that the University would instantly take the elderly husband in *Belinda* for a portrait of the Rector of Lincoln, though it is no more than the coarse caricature of a miserly old curmudgeon of a pedant who slave-drives his wife. She can hardly have been surprised when the doors of Lincoln were closed against her: still, it was possible for her to say that Mark Pattison need not have fitted on the cap. But the case of George Eliot was different. When she wrote *Middlemarch* her fame stood as high as that of any novelist then living: she took herself very

seriously, and presumably reckoned up the implications of what she was doing when she gave to Dorothea's husband the name of Mr. Casaubon.—The Rector of Lincoln's most important book was Isaac Casaubon's Life: George Eliot had labelled her libel.

In the days when people rediscover George Eliot, as they have rediscovered Trollope, and begin again to read *Middlemarch*, helpful writers will, no doubt, remind them that Casaubon is a portrait; and they will probably come to believe that Mark Pattison was ignorant of the wisdom of the Germans—though his writings teem with German quotation: and that he was a mere pedant, obscurely conscious how superficial was his grasp on knowledge and dimly afraid lest he should be found out by the wife whom he used as a secretary. Now, the last thing that Mark Pattison feared was to be found out: he grew in pride and confidence of his attainment; he turned over his intellectual possessions as a miser might handle his hoard; and like a miser spared neither himself nor others in the constant study to increase them.

As for the partner in this marriage, she must have felt that she was slave-driven, and must, I think, have allowed her feelings to become

known to Miss Broughton and George Eliot. But she resented fiercely the printed lucubrations of the two ladies who took on themselves to be her partisans. It was "an unpardonable offence" to mention *Middlemarch* to her: so writes Sir Charles Dilke, her second husband, and he quotes her saying that, so far as she could make out—for she refused to read the book—"Casaubon was much more to be pitied than Dorothea." She might have put it that George Eliot's Dorothea was a fool who married a sham. Now Emilia Strong had married Mark Pattison for reasons not unlike those ascribed to Dorothea: "Here was a man who could understand highly the inward life and with whom there could be some spiritual communion. . . . The union which attracted her was one which would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path." It would be her duty to study that she might help him the better in his great works. There would be nothing trivial about their lives.

The day certainly never came when Mrs. Pattison thought that her husband was not worth helping. As Lady Dilke, in the maturity

of her powers, after experience of the most cultured society in many European countries, she spoke of him as "the only really learned man she had known." While she was his wife, though she must have been much more fully aware than her novelist friends that he was an exasperating, exacting, and selfish valetudinarian, her life with him assuredly never seemed to her trivial. It is quite true that even when she was fully launched upon work and study of her own he imposed on her drudgery for him to such a degree that she crippled herself with arthritis; yet I expect that the detachment, of which I was conscious more than twenty years after their marriage, produced itself slowly. It is possible, even probable, that it may have sprung from more than a mere weariness; that she did not accept the ideals to which he had given himself. She may well have thought them selfish as the miser's. But there never can have come from her—for she was supremely intelligent—the suggestion that he was in any sense a disappointed man. The mummy that I saw wheeled past me there, inert and to all seeming lifeless, glowed with intense inward fire. He could write, in that very year, when he knew himself stricken and condemned:

"I have never ceased to grow, to develop, to discover, up to the very last; while my contemporaries who started so far ahead of me fixed their mental horizon before they were thirty-five, mine has been ever enlarging and expanding. . . .

"I can truly say that daily converse with the poetry and literature of all times, ancient and modern, has been to me its own sufficient reward; on this very day—New Year's Eve, 1884—I can read Sophocles with greater delight than I ever did. . . .

"There seems to have fulfilled itself for me that adage of Goethe which when I first came upon it appeared a mere paradox:

Was man in der Jugend wünsche.

Hat man im Alter die Fülle.

Of that which a man desires in youth,

He shall have in age as much as he will."

And indeed some letters of his written in his last years convey a sense of power which I do not gain from the reprinted essays, work of his physical prime—if this strange creature ever had a physical prime. Perhaps even more than his two principal writings, the *Life of Casaubon* and the *Life of Milton*, they seem

to justify the opinion held of him by his contemporaries.

A rough measure of that may be given by the fact that Leslie Stephen gave to Mark Pattison sixteen columns in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as against three allotted to Liddell. Both men spent their whole life in the service of Oxford: Liddell was increasingly conspicuous, and as Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor attained to seeming the University's perfect figure-head. Pattison was increasingly withdrawn from all activity, even in his own small college: and of the two he is now by far the less remembered. Yet it seems unlikely that anybody will ever interest himself in the life of Dean Liddell: whereas I think there will always be some stray student attracted to the personality of the man whom Rhoda Broughton so detested and whom George Eliot despised, and who, little regarding loves or hates, set down in his posthumously published *Memoir* the history of his own intellectual life.

His father, who had been a commoner of Brasenose, was an evangelical parson in Yorkshire and chaplain to the Duke of Leeds. It was "assumed from the cradle upwards" that Mark Pattison, the eldest of ten children (of whom the youngest daughter became notable



as "Sister Dora"), was to go to Oxford and to be a Fellow of a College—Oriël for choice. Oriël and Balliol were reported by Lord Conyers Osborne, son of the Duke, to be "the two prison houses," says Mark Pattison; where young men were actually made to work, and his father, who "must have read Debrett at that time more than the Bible," decided that Oriël was the more genteel. So to Oriël in 1832 went the student. Newman was then one of its tutors, but the evangelical Mr. Pattison had no guess of what that name was to mean.

Nobody ever went up to the University with more eager anticipations than this country-bred boy from the Yorkshire moors; and nobody was ever more sadly disappointed. "I was highly nervous and delicate, and having never been at school had not had sentiment or delicacy crushed out of me," says the Memoir. This does not mean that he had been brought up a milksop: he rode to hounds, he had the taste for outdoor life, he had laid the foundations for a long love of angling; but he had had no companions except his sisters—eight of them—and the sons of the village cottagers. "Comradeship was the thing I had most longed for." But he had looked forward to joining "an ardent band of fellow-students



—an honourable company of rivalry in pursuit of knowledge.” It was difficult for him to comprehend “why men should flock to a university not to study”: and not understanding “the want of conformity” between himself and others of his age, he blamed his “successive failures to establish a good understanding with one after another” on some shameful defect in himself. “I felt humiliated and buffeted . . . and developed a self-consciousness so sensitive and watchful that it came between me and everything I said and did.”

Boyish unhappiness has cut deep when it is so poignantly remembered by an old man whom life as a whole has not disappointed: who has come to prize that unlikeness to others which he was then so anxious to be rid of. But there is no trace that he regrets the lack of public school training. “I was not spoiled, as a boy is who has been brutalised by a school: I was only rude, unfledged, in a state of nature.”

A proud man—and in Mark Pattison pride, perhaps defensively, grew into arrogance—does not easily praise that in which he feels himself deficient: and a normal English education does produce results which are admirably described by one who, from being a poor boy in the West of Ireland, rose through an Irish Catholic

school and university to a high administrative post. "Our schools and our university give just as good teaching as yours," he said, "but your men acquire a subtlety of contacts in dealing with other men which ours do not learn." It was precisely this power to adapt himself to others without sacrifice of his own character that Pattison lacked: and notably enough it was lacking also in the three men to whose lives he devoted most attention—the scholars Casaubon and Scaliger and the poet Milton. In what he has written about them, passages of interpretation occur which have the unmistakable accent of self-portraiture: and in the last passage of his Memoir he does not hesitate to make comparison between his own life and Milton's. For the moment, however, one may be content with saying (in language which he would have disliked) that Pattison was a "bad mixer," and that consciousness of the fact made him unhappy until success brought solace; and that when he had finally achieved a self-centred poise he was (like Casaubon and like Milton) "gey ill to live wi'."

Success and poise were both long in coming to him. He failed in his degree examination, barely getting a second class, which to a man

of his type was black tragedy. There seemed an end to his "darling dream of living a life of study in a college." But his father persuaded him to persevere. He returned to Oxford, competed for fellowships at Oriel and Balliol, but was rejected. Meantime he had been drawn deeply into the Tractarian movement, and failing a fellowship, "it was natural," as he puts it, "with my increasing religiosity that I should think of Orders." On Newman's advice he went to lodge in the house which Pusey had taken in St. Aldate's as quarters for young graduates, who were at work upon his Library of the Fathers. Luckily for him, not liking his company, he had moved out into private lodgings when a fellowship of Lincoln, open only to Yorkshiremen, fell vacant. Lincoln would certainly not have elected a known Puseyite. But the Fellows did not know, and, to his joy, they elected him. It is characteristic that he has no scruple in retrospect about having kept his allegiance secret from them.

Once installed, he gave full play to his "high church fanaticism." The actual step of taking Orders he passes without mention: but he gives a few passages from his diary of September, 1843—his thirtieth year—when he was on a visit to Littlemove. Here is an extract:

"Newman kinder but not perfectly so. Vespers at eight. Compline at nine. How low, mean, selfish, my mind has been to-day; all my good seeds vanished."

This was transcribed grimly fifty years later by one who exulted in deliverance from the "masses of imported superstition or native tendency to pietism," which had once brought him so near being "enveloped in the catastrophe of 1845"—when Newman went over to Rome. Yet Mark Pattison scarcely recognises the strength of the anchor that held him. Following Newman meant following him in the resignation of his fellowship; it meant definite renunciation of his "darling dream." He was probably never in any real danger of committing self-sacrifice; his nature was not cast for such heroism. Yet he thinks that he might have been worried into it by others, but for the engrossment of study and the work of teaching, in which he found a genuine vocation from the time when, in 1843, he became a tutor of the college.

"In dealing with the students I soon became aware that I was the possessor of a magnetic influence which soon gave me a moral ascendancy in the college to which at last everybody, the Rector even, the students, the very servants succumbed."

Nothing could have seemed less likely than that a man of Pattison's qualities should attain to this personal success; but he differed from most Oxford academics in retaining his youthful belief that a college should be "a company of honourable rivalry in pursuit of knowledge." The man who seeks an ideal ardently will always have ascendancy with the young: and Mr. R. C. Christie, one of Pattison's pupils, testifies in the *Dictionary of National Biography* that this enthusiast became after some years "absolute ruler" in what he had made "one of the best-managed colleges in the University." In 1851 the Rector of Lincoln died, and Pattison, then only thirty-eight, was put forward for the succession, and for some days seemed certain of election. But the senior element in Common-room disliked him. They wanted a man to be clubbable, and he was not; also, he was in University matters a Reformer and a Liberal, which they were not; and there were machinations which ended in the selection of one who, in the language of the Memoir, was "a mere ruffian" and "nothing better than a Satyr."

The vehemence of these expressions, dictated to a secretary more than thirty years after the event, receives this explanation:

"My whole heart and pride had in the last few years been invested in the success of the College. It belonged to my narrowness at that time to be able only to care for one thing at a time; this was the thing on which I had set my affections. In a single night the College was extinguished for all the purposes for which I had laboured. My Satan had triumphed and had turned my little Paradise into a howling wilderness."

Thereafter for two years the hurt man fell into a most unmanly despondency, until gradually the idea of devoting himself to literature strengthened and developed. He wrote a great deal in the reviews, propagandist articles on University reform, and learned studies in the history of scholarship and of philosophy. But to his later judgment it seemed that at this period his soul was "polluted and disfigured by literary ambition."

"I shared the vulgar fallacy that a literary life meant a life devoted to the making of books. . . . It cost me years more of extrication of thought before I rose to the conception that the highest life is the art to live, and that both men, women and books are equally ingredients of such a life."



At last, in 1861, circumstances permitted him to carry out this conception. The Rectorship falling vacant, he was elected to it. His "darling dream" was now realised in the fullest manner. Mr. Christie admits that he "took less active part in the administration of the College than might have been expected": his own Memoir tells us that he deliberately withdrew from University business. When the Vice-Chancellorship was offered to him he refused to take it, and applauded himself for this abstention. The routine of College affairs he describes in a letter to Mr. Thursfield (one of his closest friends) as "serving tables." He did not exert himself to keep touch with the undergraduates at large, as he had done during his active period; but he did what he enjoyed doing: he helped in the formation of responsive intelligences, the picked brains of each new flight. Throughout life he liked the society of intelligent men—young and old. That was, as has been said above in his own words, one of the "ingredients" of the highest life.

With books, he was always lavishly provided, even in his penurious days: and now he was rich. But there remained the second indispensable—women; and on being chosen Rector he married at once, and married a young girl.



There is in that fact nothing at all surprising. The remarkable thing is that he, one of the most powerful minds, though not one of the strongest characters, of his time, should have mated—however unequally—with his equal. That was what made the marriage an amazing marriage. Rhoda Broughton was content to attach her caricature of a pedant to a commonplace love-story. Her Belinda marries an old man because she fancies that she has been jilted by the young man with whom she is in love. But George Eliot cannot be content with such a piece of artificial machinery; she sets herself to answer the question: Why did this remarkable young woman marry an elderly and unattractive scholar? Part of the story she reconstructed accurately—probably from Mrs. Pattison's talk; but she failed to realise that Mark Pattison had a peculiar attraction for the young—the "magnetism" which he himself has spoken of. Without this, I do not think that Emilia Strong would have married him. She must have had choice in plenty. She had wit and high spirits as well as beauty and talent, and she fluctuated between her London art-student circle and her home in Oxford, where pretty young women were both rare and in great request. But she was just as much con-

cerned for things of the mind as George Eliot's Dorothea, and though she had a sense of humour (which Dorothea is not endowed with) she had plunged deep into religion of the Puseyite school. It was in the nature of things that such a girl should be flattered when a man of Mark Pattison's eminence talked to her in the fashion which Mr. Christie describes:

"In intercourse with those younger than himself his conversation was marked by a delicate irony. His words were few and deliberate, but pregnant with meaning, and above all stimulating. His aim was always to draw out by the Socratic method what was best in the mind of the person he conversed with, and he seemed to be seeking information and suggestions for his own use."

If that was how the Rector of Lincoln discoursed with young men, he was assuredly not less gracious to a pretty young woman; and when the thought of marriage was in his mind, his masculine vanity was no doubt quickened by finding that he could command the attention of a much-admired girl in a society where younger and more naturally attractive men were plentiful. Such a stimulus adds to power.

Also, more than this, Emilia Strong was in the grip of forces which he himself had experienced; and everything prompted him to guide her on the path by which he had emerged, as he felt, to serener heights and a wider outlook.

He himself has described his evolution. From the Puritan religion of his home, "almost narrowed to two points, fear of God's wrath and faith in the doctrine of the atonement," his horizon had widened to "the idea of the Church." When this "expanded beyond the limit of the Anglican communion," Anglicanism "fell off from me like an old garment, as Puritanism had done before." Yet instead of precipitate action (involving, as has been noted, the surrender of his fellowship) he pursued the line of solitary thought, which led him to conclude that "if God interferes at all to procure the happiness of mankind, it must be on a far more extensive scale than by providing them with a Church of which far the majority of them will never hear." So, "slowly and in many years," he came "to that highest development when all religions appear in their historical light as efforts of the human spirit to come to an understanding with that Unseen Power whose pressure it feels but whose motives are

a riddle." And so "Catholicism dropped off, as another husk outgrown."

Such views, by their large sweep, must always have a glamour for the ardent young: but there was also the fascination of the forbidden in the position of a clergyman who could shed so many wrappings and still wear the same Anglican clothes: and it is possible that Emilia Strong at the age of twenty may have felt this.

There were, of course, minds who would refuse admiration to so ambiguous a figure, and it is more than possible that she may have heard unflattering comment upon it. Mr. Tuckwell, who when she married was already the husband of her sister, disapproved not of Mark Pattison's free thought, but of his failure to act on its logical consequences. In his *Reminiscences of Oxford* he says that in discussion with Thorold Rogers (who upon a similar change of view had relinquished his Orders) the Rector of Lincoln said that he was "too old to make a change injurious to himself." That was certainly a not very noble attitude, and in Mr. Tuckwell's judgment "it left him cynical." I am very sure, however, that this single phrase does not express the whole of Mark Pattison's mind. Undoubtedly he repudiated anything that savoured of intellectual or spiritual knight-

errantry—a quality which Mr. Tuckwell, also an unusual type of parson (but much more lovable) held in high esteem. But to have made the surrender which Mr. Tuckwell evidently thought proper to be made would have seemed to the Rector of Lincoln a sin against the spirit. Because through the pursuit of learning he had approached closer to truth, was he to incur penalties which must check that pursuit? “I could no more have helped what took place within me than I could have helped becoming ten years older.” If he grew while others did not, was he to put in their hands the powers to check his continuing growth, by denying him the material opportunity for unrestricted study?

Yet, as I think, in consequence of this incongruity between his actual beliefs and those which his position implied, certain ungenial phases of his nature developed. One was an acrid contempt for all who accepted as the end of inquiry what he viewed as one stage on the way to truth. Such people were not merely different from himself, but hostile: they wanted to punish him for being higher than they. A note of defiance runs all through the Memoir—although it has the peculiar quality of a challenge delivered after the challenger is safe out of harm’s way.

Also, one may attribute to some uneasiness about his position the *εἰρωνεῖα* or avoidance of public duties which marked his later phase. Probably he felt safer in retreat.

But the main truth about him is given in a note upon Mr. Tuckwell's characterisation by Mrs. Pattison—or, as she then was, Lady Dilke.

"During the last hours he made his Apologia, which . . . came to this, that his aim had been to live for knowledge; knowledge not for its own sake but for the joy of acquiring it."

This does not mean that he classed his passion with a hobby like stamp-collecting. Learning was to him an instrument of the supreme self-culture. "The result of learning is not a book, but a man." Yet "learning" is not the word which he chooses, since it may be applied to the mere accumulation of memorised facts or vocabularies. His aim is knowledge, in which all facts acquired are perceived in their relation to each other.

"Of the man whose profession is learning," he writes in his *Milton*, "it is characteristic that knowledge is its own end and research its own reward."

The best side of Pattison is seen in the cult of knowledge as a food for the higher life: the



worst—and no doubt this he admitted in his *Apologia*—was that he lost sight of all else in the “joy of acquiring knowledge,” which he came to pursue with the selfishness of an ascetic voluptuary. George Eliot has this biting phrase: “Mr. Casaubon was liable to think that others were providentially made for him.” She thought that he treated his wife on that assumption.

An answer to this charge is given in those passages where Mark Pattison apologises for the Casaubon of real life—the man who had attempted “complete mastery of the ancient world by exhaustive reading.” He dwells on the “nervous sensibility” of the hard student “unequal to the fret and worry of life.”

“We must make allowance for the irritability engendered by a life of hard reading against time. Casaubon thought every moment lost in which he was not acquiring knowledge. He resented intrusion as a cruel injury. To take up his time was to rob him of his only property.”

With the change of a name, all this, I am sure, would have been regarded as applicable to Casaubon’s biographer. He, too, who pinched everywhere else, spent all he could save upon books. Assuredly Pattison, who in his *Memoir* notes that he met his father’s liberality “by a prudence and economy from which in fifty



years I have never deviated," would have passed by with scorn Miss Broughton's caricature of his proneness to count pennies. But it may be true that, when affluence came to him, he maintained habits formed when they were necessary to his purpose, and did not consider how they affected anyone but himself.

Whoever cares to complete an unsympathetic impression of his exterior has only to turn to the novelists. George Eliot's method is to let half a dozen of her characters, man and woman, have a slap at describing him when his engagement to Dorothea is announced. So he is presented as "a death's head skinned over for the occasion," "a dried preparation," "a lifeless embodiment of knowledge." Against this we have only Dorothea's iteration that "his head was like Locke's, and had the same deep eye-sockets"; but this is capped by Celia's inquiry whether Locke had "those two white moles with hairs on them, and blinked before he spoke."

Portraits inspired by dislike have their value; but it is worth while to put against these the memory of him retained by two ladies who were frequent inmates of the Rector's house towards the close of his life. One was his own niece, one his wife's. They give a chilly picture:

the scholar, prematurely old, coming in to crouch huddled up by the fire, apparently inanimate—but suddenly, when some word of talk stirred him, looking up to flash out something that shot straight to the mark, and then gradually thawing.

Both dwell on his willingness, even his desire, to guide and form a young mind, by the supreme encouragement of giving of his best. Questions were treated as if they deserved the most careful answers. There is a fine courtesy in such an attitude, and counsel so given puts the one who receives it on honour not to neglect the teaching.

In one case the education was conducted partly through letters, which Miss Gertrude Tuckwell has preserved. They reveal much of the teacher for whom all education was essentially our instruction in “the art to live.”

His first precept comes strongly from so bookish a man: “Read very little, and especially not scraps of many things . . . but ponder much what you read.”

The purpose is to teach her to think rather than to learn; and very early he replies to one of her questions, which he has re-stated thus:

“Are our opinions to be founded upon the grounds proper to each case, or are they to be

taken up at haphazard, as we find them formed by custom and our teachers?

"Put so, I think the question is already answered. It would not be rational to hold an opinion for any other reason than because it seems to us true. And no opinion can seem to us true unless we have examined into the grounds of it. An opinion is a statement about things which exist. Unless that statement conforms to the existence of those things as they really are, the statement is not true. Truth of speech is one of the first and simplest moral obligations, and truth of speech is founded upon truth of thought. Truth of thought is the conformity of our thought to the facts.

"Certainly there are great inconveniences (to some of which you allude) attending the discharge of this duty. One such inconvenience is the great trouble it occasions. This is the principal reason why so few people attempt to carry out through life the performance of this duty.

"Most people's 'I think' means 'I choose to say without having taken the trouble to ascertain.'"

"But you will not urge the inconvenience of performing a duty as a reason for shirking it?"

(Yet conformity of our action to our thought is one of the forms of truth, and often attended

by inconvenience, which Mark Pattison had conspicuously shirked.)

The instruction went on to convey that it is also a duty to refrain from forming opinion before it is ripe.

“You say ‘when one is unsettled in religion it is difficult to think of anything else.’

“But you should try to give your mind to something else, for the following reason.

“You cannot, at eighteen, have the means, or materials, of mastering the religious problem. But in order to acquire the means of doing so, it is necessary to cultivate the faculties and put them on the stretch. Only a well-disciplined understanding can be applied to any topic with good effect.

“If you wish, therefore, some time or other to arrive at satisfaction in religion, it is necessary to turn away from brooding upon it, and apply yourself to such pursuits as will, in the end, qualify you for dealing with it.

“High subjects cannot be approached as you would ask how much is 9 times 9. They are all part of a large system of knowledge which must be studied. . . . While you continue to treat philosophy as a branch of information, you

have not really begun to have an 'interest' in the questions you put."

None the less he sends her the succinct expression of his mind on the supreme questions of speculative thought, scattered here and there with such *obiter dicta* as this: "I doubt very much the truth of the proposition that priests believe in the gods they worship. . . . Prophets are fanatical, and believe, but priests are generally professional quacks trading in beliefs they don't share."

To carry out his counsel demands application, and this application should be given at any cost.

"As to that question of *time*, my dear G., there are two different purposes in self-education, for one of which *time* is necessary—for the other not.

"1. For acquisition of information, or of languages, or of sciences, or of anything—time is wanted. If your circumstances make it difficult for you to secure any part of the day to yourself—you must try to snatch odd minutes whenever possible. Much may be done in this way, by a person in earnest—and as mere acquisition does not demand isolation of mind, much may be stored away even in a room full

of people. Your Aunt Frances" (Mrs. Pattison) "was one of a large family, and one in which there was no thought for things of the mind, yet she always managed to be gathering up something—a little every day—a penny a day is £1 10 0 a year!

"2. But besides acquirement there is mental tone, which is much more important. Sociability, which is the thief of time, is equally inimical to mental elevation. But we have to try to hold the soul in communion with ideas, though herding with the world combats this secret endeavour, you are not peculiarly situated in this respect. We all have our 'world' great or small—and the 'world' is, and always has been, the enemy of the soul. The religionists imagine the 'world' to be dancing, cards, plays, novels, etc., that is their interpretation from their point of view, but viewed more generally, the 'world,' which is at enmity with the life of the soul, is all the sense impressions of single objects, and fleeting impressions, which make up the whole life of the vulgar.

"Education—whether done at home or at college—consists far more in maintaining this mental elevation, than in acquiring knowledge. Still knowledge is desirable 'per se,' and languages are the key to it."



Naturally also there arose the question: For what end should she educate herself? and in the latter part of 1881 Miss Tuckwell developed the desire to earn her own living, and her first thought was to be a teacher. This, her mentor tolerated. But a new scheme developed. She would be a hospital nurse. This met with furious disapproval, notable because the most famous of hospital nurses was then Sister Dora, the Rector's youngest sister. He pleaded for "another year at least of probation and self-preparation at home."

"You are very young—you have great, though unexercised, mental powers. It would be doing yourself a great injustice if you were to rush, raw and unthinking, into a situation in which you would have no inducement to self-improvement, no chance of getting it, and have to herd with narrow bigots who have neither the education of books, nor that of the world."

Six weeks later:

"As for your trying to keep up any part of your reading, I think it's not worth your while if you are determined on entering a child's hospital. It is not a question of whether you will have time to yourself or no. As matter of fact you will have very little time—much



less than is shown by their time table, the exigencies of a hospital not allowing hours to be kept to, and the lassitude of wearing work and broken nights incapacitating the mind even in those hours of leisure you may be able to secure. But a far more fatal bar to any attempt to sustain the intellectual life will be the character of your surroundings. You will have to live in the society of some of the most ignorant and bigoted of your sex—it will be impossible for you to maintain your mind in its present, or its heretofore, attitude of converse with the forms of intellect and beauty. You will of necessity take the colour of the creatures with whom you live, i.e., vulgar, commonplace stupidity. So you had better begin to rehearse your part at once, lay aside all books but novels, and crush down your thoughts. You will have your wish to be earning your living, and for the sake of ‘earning’ it, the life you will be leading will be one not worth your living.”

Such was his cold storm of disdain for any activities which should set up a claim for equal worthiness against the intellectual life.

It is like the aristocrat’s traditional disdain for a shopkeeper’s virtues. And in truth, for

Pattison, possession of what he meant by knowledge—that is, the formed, equipped, and disciplined intelligence, sure of itself, master of its own weapons and its own treasures—was the stamp of a self-recognising aristocracy. In that aristocracy he was almost disdainfully sure of his position, and counted himself a guide to the path by which admission to its ranks could be won. It should be remarked that, like most aristocrats of the intelligence, he accepted the claims of social aristocracy as no less valid, and regarded knowledge of the world as being at least one of the covetable attainments of culture. That also was a form of mastery, and mastery, not service, was the end to which he aimed.

As the project of nursing dropped out of his pupil's mind, intercourse cleared itself of these angry clouds, and some of the later letters are touched with tenderness. But for anything except the life of pure study, this instructor was not concerned to give instruction. Still, his kindness kept his correspondent wondering why such stores of knowledge should be placed under contribution for a mere girl. Once, however, she began to understand. He spoke of "the interest of youth with its feelers reaching out into the unknown." "Later," he said,

"people passed into acceptances, and the end of questioning meant becoming commonplace."

"I cried out, 'But I don't want to leave off being interesting.' The Rector, as he stooped over the fire, suddenly turned his sharp, comprehending glance on me. 'Ah! but once you have ceased to be interesting you *won't know* it.'"

It is pleasant to find human traits in so dry a philosopher. Mark Pattison liked to absorb a young woman's whole attention: that was the proper return for what he gave. "He was furious when I wanted to go to a dance or talk to undergraduates," says his other niece. She thought there was something pathetic and appealing about him; and so there was; women are always indulgent to a man's vanity: young or old, they know that his anxiety is to please them by displaying his best gifts. I doubt if the Rector of Lincoln was quite so painstaking with even the cleverest undergraduates.

Among men of his own standing there is at least a suggestion that he inclined to demonstrate his superiority. Mr. Tuckwell writes:

"In the book-lined gallery which opened out of his drawing-room he would sit or stand, in the short morning coat which he affected as a dinner dress, the centre of a group of

guests, picked men from many walks of thought, scientist, æsthetic, literary: as each proffered his own patented topic, Pattison would take it up and handle it with swift, clear, exhaustive analysis, ending always with an apologetic, 'But, you know, it's not my subject.'"

I find my impression of him best rounded off by this letter to a man to whom he signed himself "Yours affectionately."

"MY DEAR THURSFIELD,

"Had you not better ask me to give you an easy definition of God? I could as soon do that, as say in a few words in what Goethe's greatness consists; you are sensible of that greatness as your letter shews; so am I. That being so, you are as capable of analyzing your impressions, as I of doing the same by mine. Is it not some evidence of greatness that we feel all the attempts to delineate him, by Lewes, Hayward, etc., to fall short of our conception? One thing only I can add, that this greatness must not be looked for in G's written books, either taken singly or the whole 28 vols. in a lump. It seems to me one of the marks of greatness that the great man is never represented by his books. Voltaire is a signal instance:

what heaps of trash the 75 vols. of his works consist of, nor has he left a single production which taken separately can be said to be worth reading. If we still read him it is for his style and general spirit. I had forgotten the *Siècle de Louis Quatorze*, which must be excepted. Yet Voltaire is the greatest figure in the whole of the 18th Century."

That to me in its easy range and its confidence speaks of the great scholar. If there sounds a note of arrogance, well, that was part of the man. But what vitality! And that was written in January, 1884, about six months before he died, by the mummified creature with sombre, defiant eyes that I saw wheeled past me down Brasenose Lane.

# A SCHOLAR





## IV

### A SCHOLAR

I was brought up among gardeners: and where I write now is one of the best gardens that I know, a knoll of ground by a beautiful great river, given over to orchard chiefly, yet with vegetable beds well distributed, and flowers diffused over the whole. Here for the moment the professional gardener's triumph—he is a very good professional—is a bed of daffodils planted round the roots of a big spreading apple with grass outside them, so that the blooms show against the green, yet, in the tilled soil, grow stronger and taller than any daffodil can grow in turf: hundreds of them are ablow together, and the very robustness of their splendour makes them almost deserve Geoffrey Dearmer's epithet, "truculent daffodils that fling their trumpets down the wind." No poet could ever have felt that about the wild daffodil with its delicate quivering feminine grace: and the true distinction

of this garden by the Shannon lies in a flower which the professional gardener has not yet taken in hand to stiffen and straighten and disnature. Fritillaries are blossoming there in low-lying sward which the river floods—perhaps just a little bigger than they grow purely as wild flowers in Magdalen meadows. Here the directing intelligence has done what will always be done by the flower lover who has to carry out his own manual work: the right flower is put into the right place and left to multiply: man's labour is ended, nature takes on the work.

In the garden of the future there will, I think, be an instinctive effort—for the new poor are great gardeners—to get the most of beauty for the least of labour. With the hoe or the mowing machine, you are working against nature; she will assist you in many ways but not with gravelled walks or shorn turf. Already those gardens are pleasantest to live with which have this character of a wise economy—a character that I can trace from that far-off place in Donegal of my childhood down to the abode, long dwelt in, where two long lives ended—an ugly house which they had covered with beauty, standing in a

pleasance which they had made out of a dull suburban plot.

My father and mother indeed never did much gardening with their own hands, nor is it likely that such people will ever be to any great extent manual workers; they will never in any state of society have the time to spare; and in any state of society such as they will earn enough to procure the two things in which they were not frugal—flowers and books. For the provision of books he chiefly was responsible and she of the flowers. It was she who really made the garden, planned, directed, supervised, and, when she had leisure, planted. Where he equalled her, as she equalled him concerning books, was in the power of enjoyment, the genius for appreciation. Yet she and not he was the creative mind, the plastic artist, in a garden; just as her appreciation of literature was more a writer's and his more a scholar's.

In a garden, her concern was to get a general effect—not indeed one of these newfangled strivings after a deliberate and limited colour scheme, but a general effect of flowers and plants setting each other off, a whole of beauty with exquisite passages, each having its own individual value and significance. These things

he, too, could feel and delight in; yet even in the garden he was the scholar, a lover of the minute beauty and interest, quick to note the small thing which others would pass by. He knew botany as he knew nearly everything, not exhaustively but with a clear grasp of its principles and with a wealth of details held in his amazing memory; and this gave to many flowers a charm for him apart from their decorative value. When the rest of us would go round with my mother to see daffodils in companies, tulips rising through a mist of blue forget-me-not, crown imperial displaying its strong splendid design of leaf and diadem in the border, he would carry one away to see how the New Zealand walking-stick tree (*pittosporum*) had condescended to put out its almost imperceptible blossom, flowering as if it were at home. The berries on the yew, the rare fruit on the arbutus when it came, were I think a keener joy to him than the masses of red thorn and of lilac which made this last of his gardens so lovely in their season. And of all things—but specially as old age came on him—he loved the first faint signs of the stirring year—the coltsfoot's grey dusty spike by the roadside, the wych elm's scaly leaf-like blossom, the hazel's faintly red flower,

dearer to him even than the crimson catkins on the larch, because it was of earlier advent. I should like to hang a votive plate with grateful verses on a big flowering currant just outside one of our windows, that was always among spring's harbingers, and always a playground for the tits that he loved to watch, and to pamper with coco-nuts. They also were tiny and exquisite details.

I think that love of detail is the scholar's hallmark and he of whose memory I would fix some outline was above all things a scholar, but assuredly not a scholar only. His was one of those equally developed brains which are good for all uses; it enabled him to study mathematics with the same facility as he acquired languages. He might have been a great lawyer, or a great civil servant; but he followed in the track of his tradition. For ten generations, since the first of them came over from Wales with a bishop of Derry (and lived there to see the siege and eat half of a pair of leather breeches) nearly all his forbears had been schoolmasters or clergymen; his father was both; he himself, a prize-winning pupil, was pushed hard at school; then followed Dublin University with its perpetual round of

examinations and finally the fellowship, which meant an establishment in life. His youth was too laborious to have many pleasures; but flowers were always chief among them. His father was a grower of carnations, and he himself sought to maintain that tradition also—unavailingly, for he never had a garden which lent itself to this as had the sandy soil near the Portstewart beaches. We used always to say that if he and my mother ever came to a divorce it would be because she insisted on cramming anemones or the like into some choice corner which his coveted carnations refused to fill.

His youth was spent absolutely in country conditions; he had a countryman's eye, noting instinctively anything uncommon whether tree or plant; but no care for country sports, whether shooting or fishing or riding. Late in life, however, after he had watched the extraordinary successes of his younger sons in cricket and football, he said to me, "You know, I think I could have played games if there had been games when I was at school." And it certainly was not from their mother's side that these lads got the precision of hand and eye, the combined dexterity and judgment, which made one of them in particular so famous



that quarter of a century after his early death his name is still on the lips of those who talk cricket or football.

My father's early life, indeed, had little to do with young men's sports; it was overshadowed with young men's deaths; he grew up under a cloud of calamity, his mother drowned while bathing, his brothers and sisters perishing away of disease. He himself was never robust, and with the family history before them no insurance company would ever accept him. His vital energy, or whatever one should call the nerve force that carries certain people through, must have been prodigious. Whatever else in him weakened and flagged, however his body wasted, this central fire burnt, never fiercely but steadily. Perhaps it was simply his courage. Once when I was in Donegal he sent for me; the doctor had decided on a very grave operation to relieve what had for years kept him in torment. "At my age—seventy-five"—he wrote, "one cannot expect to survive such a thing." I came up and found him in hospital for a preliminary twenty-four hours. Instead of talking about his illness he turned at once to what really interested him—his introduction to the *Book of Armagh*. He had not actually brought in his manuscript,



but, lying there, his mind had gone on working, and he had reached one of those small results which are the critical historian's triumphs; the piecing together of disconnected statements so that once the proper juxtaposition is made they fit like the bits of a Chinese puzzle; there can be no dispute. The deduction which he had made was irrefragable, establishing a certain point as to St. Patrick's missionary journeys. Next morning the operation was performed. When I was allowed in on the second day after, he was correcting proof sheets; but on the day before he had given the first of his returning energy to interviewing one of his favourite divinity students. That typified his life. Gardening was his recreation; the garden and his existence were so woven together you could not separate them; but his work and his young men were what he lived for.

The two objects were quite disconnected. He had friends among rising scholars, and he delighted to help and be helped by them; but few among the young men who were his intimates were concerned with his own line of study, and many of them little concerned with study at all. While I was still a schoolboy, before we left Donegal, his chief companion was a young doctor, keenest of athletes and

sportsmen—and that friendship never passed out of his life. Afterwards when he came to Dublin to take charge of the divinity school in Trinity, he had a whole world of the young to choose from—and he chose by no means only from the divinity school. Two of his closest friends were laymen, afterwards distinguished in letters, and one of the two was in those days conspicuous for political opinions quite other than my father's. Indeed that friend led to strange confusions, for he was habitually seen about either with my father or with John O'Leary, the old Fenian ex-convict; and the two hawk-nosed, spare, grey-bearded figures were easily mistaken. They met one day in the Hibernian Academy, where was J. B. Yeats' portrait of O'Leary. "Now, Dr. Gwynn, in view of this likeness that is said to exist between us, all I can say is, I hope neither of us will ever do anything that can in any way compromise the other." It was a delightful speech from the ex-rebel to the professor of divinity—pervaded by a subtle humour of which both men were equally conscious.

But though my father's attention and affection concentrated itself always on one or two chosen (and beauty in young men was a great

attraction to him) I think the whole body of divinity students felt his personal interest in young men, his delight in their companionship. Sometimes, he found a gardener among them and that was a great joy. But all their affairs interested him—their examinations, their professional start, their marriages. He talked no doubt to his special intimates about his own work, but theirs made the engrossing topic. Perhaps he realised that the best he could do for them, the most that he could give them, was through this personal intercourse. Yet I think that here his instinct rather than deliberate choice directed; he had a true vocation. Teacher he was, but indirectly far more than directly; he had none of the orator's gifts. I have never heard anyone speak of his lectures, though scores have spoken to me with veneration of their professor, and of what they learned from him. His students represented his official work, the duty he was paid for, and they had always the first call on his time. Yet always the work that was distinctively his own, the work of his scholarship, went on with the persistence and tenacity of a natural force.

By choice he was a Biblical scholar working in the field of Oriental languages. A competent

Hebraist from his college days, he took up Syriac when he was turned fifty and great part of his achievement in scholarship grew out of it. While he was still in his remote Donegal parish (we used to drive twenty-five miles to the train on a journey to Dublin) he had given much help in scholarship to his bishop, Dr. Alexander, the famous orator, afterwards Primate; and he had edited one of the Pauline Epistles in the Speaker's Commentary. But the change of life which came with his election to the chair of Pastoral Theology meant facilities and leisure for much that had been impossible in Donegal: and through his study of Syriac he added more stones than one to the building up of real knowledge. Textual criticism seems a cold unfriendly kind of study, barren of human interest. Yet in history at large, Christianity is not without importance; and the history of its documents is no small part in the history of Christianity. We desire to know how old really is that collection of writings which we call the Bible; how and in what form they were first written; how edited, how diffused. To such questions as these the answer is laborious; and such men as my father construct it bit by bit—and sometimes their work is not solid. It was once

said to me by a famous scholar that no piece of textual criticism which my father had undertaken need ever be handled again, except in the light of new knowledge; he worked once and for all.

People talk about the artist's passion. I have known no artist slave over his work with the same fervour as I have seen bestowed, and sometimes by young men, on the task of comparing infinitely small variations in two ancient manuscripts. One great scholar who was kind to me in old days twice brought himself to death's door in Spain by labour for endless hours without food or comfort. Of this, I am thankful to say, my father would have been incapable. He would have done his work swiftly yet patiently, with unerring precision: but at reasonable hours he would have issued for his meals and taken a reasonable educated human being's interest in the flavour of the local wine; nor would he have let his labour so engross him that he could not visit whatever was memorable in the place. His mind suffered from no monomaniac absorption; all things interested him, the movement of world affairs, the shape and colour of life; yet these interests never disturbed his power of concentration on his own peculiar task.

With Syriac his original contributions to knowledge began; and to Syriac he returned in the very last year of his life, relieving a younger scholar of a task from which military service had called him; that was the war work which at eighty-seven my father found to do. But during the greater part of his professional existence he was diverted from Syriac to another field. He gave twenty years to a task which for forty years already had engaged another scholar, his friend Bishop Reeves; so wide were the ramifications of study involved in preparing the definitive edition of Trinity's chief treasure, the *Book of Armagh*. This book is not really a book but a volume containing a whole library of historic documents copied by the same scribe twelve hundred years ago, which, taken together in their entirety, constitute "the oldest and most authentic history of the conversion of Ireland to Christianity." To carry through such a task meant not only a labour of accuracy, almost incredible to the unexperienced, in securing the exact reproduction of the scribe's text; there was also the need for so planning a course as to avoid engulfment in a quagmire of promiscuous erudition, while at the same time leaving none of the manifold topics short of due



commentary and illustration. Infinite patience was needed that nothing might be omitted which was necessary; yet not less needed was the will to finish, the constant vision of the finished whole.

He had carried the work far, with still flagging health, in the year before the operation when I found him in the nursing home settling a point in the chronology of St. Patrick's apostleship; yet the completion was still very far off, and the end seemed to recede further and further, as the light spare figure grew more and more tenuous, the long beard and long curling locks snowier—they never lost their abundance—the white skin more and more like wrinkled ivory. Year after year passed and we thought, He will never finish. Yet the will remained; the work, interrupted again and again by infirmity, went on till at last all was done, even the supervision of printing and binding to the last detail; and in his eighty-fifth year he published a volume which he could scarcely lift, yet in whose pages you would look long before you could find one word redundant.

He had never learnt Irish and the sense of its value brought home to him by this task heightened his regret. "I thought about taking it



up," he said to me one day, "but at eighty it is rather late to begin a new language." Perhaps: yet had he made the attempt few young men could have kept pace with him. For the work on the Book, he was assisted, on this side, by one of his sons, a Celtic scholar. Another, in another department of the work, was among the numerous band of helpers. But in neither of these two scholars, nor in any of us eight sons of his who grew to manhood, did I ever discern so much of his peculiar gift, the scholar's impulse which can be a passion, as came to one of the younger generation, the eldest of his many grandchildren, who brought to the study of Irish language and Irish records my father's patience and accuracy, with perhaps a more sensitive literary perception, and with whom the old scholar spent many delighted and delighting hours, explaining intricate details of his still uncompleted task.

Old scholar and young, both are now gone; and though death came first to the old, he was working for months after the boy had gone out to Australia, on a forlorn hope of recovery, which meant abandonment of all the work upon Irish scholarship for which he really lived. Yet it was in an Australian paper that

he wrote after my father's death the account of his work on the *Book of Armagh*, from which I have quoted a few words assessing the Book's importance.

The terrible courage of the young in facing death's approach is not a thing for the mind to dwell on; but one can watch almost with pleasure age's equanimity. What should we fear for him who had nothing to fear for himself? And while his long labour was still unaccomplished, he never seemed to share our apprehension lest he should die with it undone, or be tormented by his powerlessness to make an end. He was indeed somewhat harassed from time to time by complaints of his delay: yet he never seemed to doubt his power to finish. It was strange to watch how even with flagging of bodily power the mental quality lasted. He could work less and less, he worked more slowly, sleep often overtook him at his table; yet what he did was done with the old precision, just as his handwriting, which could rival the Irish scribe's, kept its clear firm stroke to the end.

Nor did his interest in the present ever lessen. He saw three years of the war and one of his sons was in high command—the son whom among us all he loved best and whose career,

a soldier's and explorer's, was most unlike his own. So merciless to many, the time was lenient to him. He lost none very near to him. The two young athletes, so famous in the cricket field, had died many years before in the flush of their strength, or the anxieties of his last years might have been more grievous. Yet six sons survived him and we were widely scattered. Again and again he said farewell to one going out to Africa, to India, to Australia, to the War, in the expectation that it must be the last parting; years went by and the outgoer came back to find that same figure moving gently about among his garden beds—year by year growing more wraith-like, till at last it seemed as if a strong breath would blow him away. Yet never till the last did one feel him to be less than himself; and only a year before his death the spirit in him could respond to a most unlooked-for experience. Going to Trinity College on the morning of Easter Monday, 1916, he was in his rooms with one of his friends, a young scholar, home from serving in France. There was a sound of firing, the young officer went out to see what was happening and came back with news of the Rebellion. My father was cut off from his house, three miles distant in the suburbs,

and for the rest of that week he had to be an inmate of the college, which rapidly became a place of arms. He was then eighty-eight, but when I saw him a month or two later, it was evident that the chief feelings raised in him had not been of pity or of horror or anger; it had been an adventure, just as war in the field was, at least in the beginning, to so many chiefly an adventure.

He was a little proud of being the only person connected with the college who could remember when it was last in military occupation. That had been in 1848, during the rebellion headed by Smith O'Brien, whom some fifteen years later he was to know as his father-in-law. But he was vastly prouder of the fact that in 1916 his young scholar-friend was a chief director of the defensive operations. The place was strongly garrisoned, but it can have held no more picturesque figure than this so venerable one—and assuredly no brain more keenly interested and excited by all that was going on. He was always a man of peace, but I cannot even connect him in my mind with the idea of fear; and that curiosity which is a true desire to enlarge and extend experience in many directions he never lost. Through his reading, through his varied contact with

life, and especially through his innumerable friendships with the generation of his sons, his mind was richly stored; and there was no more passionate student of the war in all its ramifications. Yet all this was book knowledge; and I think he was not sorry to learn for himself what firing sounds like at close quarters, and to see with his own observant eyes even a little of what battle means.

Such inclinations remain, even in a garden; the truest taste for flowers is no way incompatible with them. If it could only have been a fight against Germans, I should have no hesitation at all in saying that he enjoyed the chance of being in it—for he was very angry with the Germans. And of this, too, I am sure—that had Clontarf been under daily shell-fire, nothing would have prevented him from noticing and taking delight in the advent of some blossom which spring had brought in his garden.

It is no matter of regret for me that he did not live to see the end of the war; he must have seen also, too much that would pain him. Apart even from our special troubles in Ireland, the first period of transition was cruel to the old, shaking their natural tranquillity. Yet whatever else he might have

disliked in the new order or in the passage to it, one thing at least would have given him happiness—to see a child that he loved setting out with her comrades to find not only the pleasure but the business of life in the cultivation of fruits and flowers. That detail of the new order, characteristic of so much, would almost have reconciled him to the prospect of seeing lady gardeners also voting at an election.

A GREAT  
IRISH CHARACTER





## V

### A GREAT IRISH CHARACTER

ENGLAND very justly prides itself on producing what are called "men of character"—people who conform to a nationally accepted type of conduct and belief, who bear on them the stamp, either of English commercial life at its best, or, still more characteristically, of the English public school. "Character" means something that they have in common, like a sealed pattern; one man of character may be relied on in a difficult pass to do what another man of character would have done. In Ireland, a less disciplined country, we produce "characters"—something quite different—something like what in eighteenth-century English was called "an original." The French keep the word, but their horror of eccentricity gives it an accent of condemnation, as if *un original* were somehow anti-social. In Ireland—and perhaps I may be permitted to thank heaven for it—a "character" is still regarded

with a mixture of affection, amusement and pride.

No place has been richer in its output of characters than Trinity College, Dublin, for no place is more Irish, if one may use the word as describing that nation which Trinity College has served—the nation of Goldsmith, Burke, Wolfe Tone, Grattan, Fitzgibbon, Lever, Isaac Butt, and Sir Robert Ball. Each and all of these were “characters,” and each in his varying way representative of the still inchoate composite nation which Swift, more than any other man, brought into being; and Swift was the greatest of all “characters.” He is to English-speaking Ireland something of what Burns is to the Scotch—an influence affecting the whole national way of thinking, speaking, and acting.

Take in this century three successive Provosts of Trinity—Salmon, Traill, and Mahaffy: all of them were “characters,” and two were great men. Traill, who had no intellectual distinction, and who, to speak plainly, was appointed because so many people wanted to keep Mahaffy out, was nevertheless original to the verge of eccentricity. All that could be predicted of his action was that he would go his own way with complete disregard of public opinion, even in

his own community; and since he was in his own way very able, this gave him a personal value which he would certainly never have possessed had he not grown up in a society that welcomed rather than repressed individual peculiarities. But Salmon and Mahaffy, who would have been remarkable anywhere, attained in Dublin a perfectly unchecked development. It seemed to show in the very bodies of these big, untidy, loose-jointed men, each wearing even his clothes as no one else did. One thinks of them together to-day, because they stood out, and because both in their writings had that robust force and that weight of personality behind an ironic phrase which they inherited from Swift. But they were no comrades, and the last thing to have been expected from either was a just estimate of the other. Yet perhaps one would have got it from Mahaffy, who, for all his spleenful habits of speech, was fundamentally large-minded and generous, and who never lost an opportunity to recognise anything that went to the credit of the university in which he spent his life.

I am writing here of the man, and not of his learning, which I cannot attempt to assess. Henry Jackson, one of the most famous among English scholars (himself a character in our

Irish sense) said to me once that Mahaffy got the name for being superficial because people thought knowledge so extended must be shallow; but that he had really done as much work in three or four branches as would have earned him a European reputation in any one of them. The truth is that, like most other remarkable Irishmen, he belonged to the eighteenth century, from which Ireland has never thoroughly emerged; and the eighteenth century had no place for specialists. Yet in scholarship he was all on the side of the moderns, and thereby temperamentally opposed to the rival star of his period—Tyrrell, the purest of pure classics—and yet another “character.” Many under-valued Mahaffy, because they could see, if only from his English style, that he lacked the sense of form—a quality which Tyrrell possessed supremely. But Greek and Latin, which to Tyrrell were exquisite examples of linguistic form, embodied in the strict bounds of two great literary periods, were to Mahaffy the keys to the history of two great world-civilisations which intertwined through many centuries and ramified out in a hundred directions. Tyrrell’s interest was in Latin and Greek; Mahaffy’s in the Greeks and Romans. Scholarship is a word with

many meanings, and to condemn Mahaffy because he was not Tyrrell is like blaming Browning because he did not write like Tennyson.

The most controversial aspect of Mahaffy's erudition was in the points where it touched Irish history. Here, as everywhere, he added to knowledge; and here, as everywhere, he went to the living sources—but with a limitation. What interested him was Anglo-Irish history. His study of the foundation of Trinity College itself, his study of the old Georgian houses in Dublin, even of the College plate—all these things brought detail and reality into our picture of the past. But there was always in him, and especially in his old age, a freakish disposition to annoy the rather undignified propensity of Nationalist Ireland to regard historic discussion as an insult to the present if it were not sufficiently reverential to the past. This is an attitude which has much justification in the fact that the denial of national freedom was often based on a perverted view of past history; but over-sensitiveness invites attack, and Mahaffy never failed to attack it—and in doing so often compromised his own reputation. He was ignorant of Irish, and he would never allow himself to see how

great a disqualification this imposed—as if one should propose to write the history of India solely from British documents. At all events, whenever he came on anything in his reading which gave colour to the view that English invaders came to Ireland and found a race of savages, he was sure to publish it abroad on the first unsuitable occasion. Such utterances bear the same relation to history as election pamphleteering, and it is a pity that he made so many of them. They blinded people to the fact that he lost his chance of succeeding Salmon as Provost by advocacy of a proposal which would have made Dublin University in reality common ground for Catholics and Protestants.

Yet, as we had occasion to see in the Irish Convention of 1917, the average nationalist Irishmen were fond of Mahaffy and proud of him, and refused to be annoyed when he was provocative, as he was there on more than one occasion. They accepted him as a character, and let him follow out his humour; and when he said a wise or witty thing—and he said not a few—they were delighted to see a famous Irishman at the top of his form.

They saw him there in many of the aspects in which he liked to display himself—as the



sportsman, for instance. A keen fisherman, he was always protesting that Ireland had a gold mine in its rivers and lakes if preservation and hotel keeping were better managed. Many were his denunciations of the national injury done by poaching: I was more impressed by his casual observation that he had shot snipe that winter—in his eightieth year. He liked us to know that he was a landed gentleman and high sheriff of his own county of Monaghan. Generally, of course, he was a declared aristocrat. But the opinions and the attitude of mind which Sir Walter Scott, for instance, held naturally and instinctively a century ago, seemed like an affectation when Mahaffy put them forward—so much has the world's tone changed in such matters. Nobody ever less concealed a foible than he his cult of social position—and especially of royalties. And, after all, if a man of great learning and reputation lays himself out to be invited by potentates, there are many more vulgar forms of recognition. Personal contact with the motive personalities of states means, above all for so shrewd an observer, the opportunity of studying history in the making. Travel for him meant not merely seeing cities of men, but getting to know their minds; and in this sense he had

travelled enormously. He thought travel part of a statesman's equipment, and I remember his saying to me that, except Gladstone, Dilke was the only English politician who had the proper training for his work.

The saying of his which amused me most and which I remember best, came during a long motor drive when he and I were on a Departmental Committee on inland fisheries in 1911. He began to question me about the Home Rule Bill, then in preparation. Would there be two Chambers? I thought so, the upper one not hereditary, but with some people there of right—distinguished ecclesiastics, for instance. I spoke without malice, but he began almost to purr like a great cat. "I abhor Home Rule," he said, "my detestation of it always increases. Yet, it would not be without a certain satisfaction that I should find myself in the last days of my life addressing an Irish House of Peers." He voted for Home Rule in the end, at the Convention, and gave his reason plumply—the failure of the present system. Turning to the Ulster group, he said: "You think you owe your prosperity to the British Government. Quite wrong. You owe it to your own magnificent qualities. The British Government has done nothing for you.

Against whom did you propose to rebel?  
Against the British Government."

He wound up that most successful apologia for his own conversion by an admonition against the prevailing Irish vice—patriotism. "Patriotism is like alcohol. Taken in moderation it is healthful, stimulating, and, as we know—as we all know—not unpalatable. But taken in excess, like pure alcohol, it is a deadly poison."

I wish he had lived to sit in an Irish House of Peers or other potentates. The Senate is a duller place without him. And I have come to hold that the solution of the Irish problem, which he alone, with one other detached member of the Convention, advocated, was the true one—a constitution like that of the Swiss, on lines of internal federation with large State rights for the various cantons.

Whether he could be called a great man, I am not sure; but he was a great "character"—and a great Irish character. One trait stamps his fidelity to national tradition. Like many other scholars he loved good wine, and I have no reason to know that he ever said a word against the port which Oxford and Cambridge venerated. But the Irish tradition looked to Bordeaux not to Oporto, and he prided himself on his connoisseurship in claret; he was as

proud of the Laffitte in the college cellar as of the priceless silver which Trinity could set on the board. As proud? no, but prouder; for the plate Trinity must keep, but the claret it could give to its guests.

# AN IRISH CARDINAL



## VI

### AN IRISH CARDINAL

THERE died in the last weeks of 1924, an old man whose life if it could be faithfully written would illuminate the whole history of Ireland, beginning at the great famine. I never knew Cardinal Logue, except by some exchange of letters: I was not of his church; and the men of his church, lay and ecclesiastic, whom I cared most for were by no means always in sympathy with him. But he came from the next parish to that in which I was brought up: I know the stock he came of, and even a complete stranger would be touched by the wave of tenderness for his memory which passed over Ireland at his death: you could feel it plainly in the Belfast Unionist Press. A representative of the government of Northern Ireland attended the funeral, a guard of honour was sent, and the gesture of goodwill touched the Catholics of Ulster. There was that about the old man which went away back to the roots



of our common past. He was the very stuff that the Irish saints were made of.

Kilmacrenan, on the Lennan in Donegal, where he was born, is the place where Columba was nurtured. I suggest no comparison of greatness: for Columba was a mighty force in European history. But both were Gael of the Gael; both came from a hard, windy, rain-beaten country into which even to-day scarcely an appreciable foreign element has penetrated, and in which life is of necessity laborious and self-denying. The Gaels from the first had the asceticism of the scholar as well as of the hermit; and Michael Logue, whose parents scraped and saved to send him to Maynooth, was no unwilling follower of the Columban tradition. It is told at Maynooth that no other student ever so completely swept the board as this poor lad from Donegal, and his first work was professorial—the chair of dogmatic theology in the Irish College at Paris. Later he held another chair, at Maynooth itself, the professorship of Irish. Yet in him the priest wholly submerged the scholar. For as long as almost any Irishman can remember, he was simply the shepherd of his people: harsh very often, as Columba also was often harsh; speaking his mind fiercely, as Columba also did, to powers

temporal; but, like Columba, having a winning and cordial humanity under his asceticism. He was loved by his own folk, as is the Donegal of which he was a living embodiment. Yet it was not the austere beauty of our country that he recalled: his face was wizened and wrinkled beyond belief, and the little bent figure was like one of the lonely, stunted thorn trees that struggle up wind-lashed in the Rosses or Glencolumbkille, growing into a toughness that is almost imperishable. Even a year or two before his death the Cardinal might have been seen taking his daily header into Carlingford Lough, opposite the cottage where he spent his summer. His speech had no grace of eloquence; it was plain and even clumsy. But there was never any doubt of what he meant, nor any mistaking the conviction of authority with which he delivered it. One never felt the Cardinal in his utterances: one always felt the Irish parish priest.

If simplicity is a mark of saintliness, he had it utterly. A story which was told me of his illustrates this, but it illustrates also another trait, familiar in the tales of our saints, especially of Columbanus, Ireland's first apostle to the continent. A young priest knocked at the door of Ara Caeli, the new and stately residence of the Catholic Primates. After a while

the door was opened—by the Cardinal. The visitor asked why. “My housekeeper is old and has sore feet.” They went in and after a while the Cardinal said, “Come now, till I show you my friends.” They went out and from all quarters birds came flocking to sit on the old bent shoulders. He knew each of them, and had names for them all. “But the worst is,” he said, “I cannot read my breviary any more walking in the garden. They give me no peace and I cannot keep my mind from them.”

Columbanus, I am sure, had the same trouble, thirteen centuries earlier.

Even the young have seen extraordinary changes in Ireland, and Cardinal Logue’s eighty-five years covered a transformation more complete than the Revolution effected in France. Yet what he really stood for was the continuity of Irish tradition. Catholic Ireland has come into control of five-sixths of the country during the last few years, and some dispute whether it is Gaelic as well as Catholic. Well, one great institution in Irish life has been self-governing, at least since the Reformation, and that is the Catholic Church. How many Englishmen know that not only Cardinal Logue, but his predecessor in the See of Armagh, Dr. McGettigan, and his successor, Dr. O’Donnell, all came from

Irish-speaking homes, and all, probably, spoke Irish before they spoke English? The political life of the country affords no parallel to this. Since O'Connell scarcely any leading Irish layman has grown up Gaelic-speaking. Where Ireland has had most freedom, the Gaelic element has been most conspicuous, and certainly not by any system of preference.

For the prominence attained by these three men, all natives of the part of Donegal which settlement scarcely touched, shows that the Roman Church as we know it in Ireland gives the most absolutely free career to talent. These were all poor men's sons. They all came from the peasantry. And though in the eye of Gaelic Ireland the fathers from whom they sprung were holders of land by right, according to English law they were mere tenants—probably tenants at will. That must have been so of Cardinal Logue's parents, on the estate of a Lord Leitrim, who allowed no tenure that he could not terminate at pleasure. Since then, the changes which Cardinal Logue saw, and which Cardinal O'Donnell greatly assisted, have turned the class from which their fathers came into peasants like those of Europe generally. We are not, as England is, divided into rich and poor; we have, right down on the soil,

a class who, whether rich or poor, know the pride of hereditary possession and the tradition of family honour. Things look black for us, odds are piled up against us in the struggle of peoples. But we have that one advantage. France knows what the peasant is worth to the race, and in the crisis of destiny a Welsh peasant was the strongest man that England found. The Roman Church in Ireland did not wait until the peasant had his title as landowner established by English law: the little thatched cottage in the mountains was no hindrance to a churchman's elevation. Hard things have often been said and felt, even by those who loved Ireland well, about the church of the Irish people, but no one can deny its homeliness; and it never found a homelier figure to represent it than the one who while these lines were written lay in state at Armagh. The Church of Ireland, the Protestant Church, has been for the past fifty years as democratically organised in principle as any church of Christendom—far more democratic than the Church of Rome; yet I do not think that in that half-century any one man has attained to be of its Bishops who came from the class that digs the soil for a living: and that class more than any other is Ireland.

Cardinal Logue at Armagh was the neighbour of at least four other Primates—Primates of All Ireland. I am sure that with all he had relations not only courteous but friendly. But one at least of them—Archbishop Alexander—and not he only, but his household—held the Cardinal in genuine and touching affection. It must have been a wonderful confrontation to see these two old men together. They came out of the same time; both had been boys when Ireland had eight million people, mostly living on potatoes (sometimes with milk). But one of the two was born into a privileged order; he had a costly education, leading up to Oxford, and, partly through his own great qualities, but partly also through the influence of a territorial magnate, became a Bishop when to be a Bishop meant wealth. Nothing in the old-fashioned Church of Ireland, the not yet disestablished Church, the Church of privilege, was more finished and superb than Dr. Alexander; and nothing more courteous, more hospitable, more accessible. He came from the lowlands of Tyrone, yet close to the highland border; and his Bishopric of Derry and Raphoe comprised all the highland region from which came those three who were each of them Bishop of Raphoe before becoming Archbishop of



Armagh. He must probably have known all three while he was yet at Derry, but I think it was later at Armagh that the friendship with Cardinal Logue grew up—perhaps only in the early years of this century, when the first phase of our revolution was ended and tension relaxed. All I know is that it existed, a rare, beautiful and exemplary thing, twenty years ago, and that the Archbishop and his household were proud of it. When the Cardinal's great object was accomplished and the new cathedral at Armagh was formally opened, the Primate's carriage was put at the disposal of the Cardinal's guests; and it is a question whether this offer gave more pleasure to the one who made or the one who accepted it. These were men for whom Christianity was a uniting, not a dividing principle; they were great personages who beautified their office by modesty and simplicity of heart. Jealousy, on this side as on that, had a hundred chances to estrange them, and they came together in friendship.

It is characteristic that the main work of Cardinal Logue's life in the Archbishopric should have been to provide his See with a fitting edifice for worship. One may approve or disapprove this Italianate building on artistic grounds; and, personally, I prefer the more



native cathedral which Dr. O'Donnell left at Letterkenny, and for whose building he was mainly responsible, to the more magnificent structure in which he was later to officiate. But the central fact is that in Cardinal Logue's boyhood Irish Catholics attended their worship in what were discourteously called "mass-houses," and that within his lifetime hundreds of fine churches were built and perhaps a dozen cathedrals. Unfair things have been said about this work of Irish church-building by people who were under no need to make such provision. From the standpoint of traditional Christianity who can deny that a wonderful and admirable work has been accomplished under Cardinal Logue's guidance and after his example? What his cathedral was to him, some modest church has been to some obscure parish priest—and the joy of achievement not simpler nor more lovable.

Much has been left unsaid here, yet not by deliberate avoidance. Unlike his successor, Cardinal Logue was neither politician nor statesman; but like every leading personage in the Ireland of his time he was obliged to take a stand in political matters. Whether he was always wise may be questioned; but where moral issues were at stake he never kept silence.

He lived to see his authority flouted on matters of morals, and it was bitter to him. A greater man might have made himself more obeyed. But there is something to be said against domineering personalities: St. Columba, for example, had to be put out of Ireland; he made too many wars. The quieter saints—St. Enda, St. Kieran, and the like—will welcome the Cardinal; and when he gets to where they are, he will, I think, find himself very much at home. They will like him the better because a few hours before he died he refused a drink of water to clear his throat. “Do you not know,” he said, “I am to receive Holy Communion in the morning?”

# AN APOSTLE



## VII

### AN APOSTLE

AN Englishwoman who recently happened to stay in Cork on October 10th found the city *en fête* and full of people. She asked the reason. "Don't you know it's Father Mathew's birthday?" they told her. O'Connell's birthday is not celebrated; commemorations of Parnell's funeral grow faint; the one Irishman of the nineteenth century, whose fame is comparable to theirs, lives in a more affectionate remembrance. Yet few outside Cork know that his grave there is a place of pilgrimage, hung with pathetic rags and covered with pins and other little personal objects like a holy well—those who once wore them hoping to benefit by the influence of his continuing sanctity.

These facts, though new to me, would mean less to my mind had I not been in the way of learning some intimate details about the life of this gentle apostle, details which brought

vividly before me both the man and his time. But before I set them down, let me recall the outline of his public career.

Theobald Mathew was born in 1790 at Thomastown, Lord Llandaff's house in Tipperary, and was brought up there; for his father, come of a younger branch, had been left an orphan and was adopted by Lord Llandaff and left in permanent charge of the huge place. All the Mathews, unlike the Anglo-Irish society to which they belonged, were Catholics. Later on James Mathew and his family (which increased to twelve, Theobald being the fourth of nine sons) moved out to a very large farm in the Golden Vale of Tipperary. But Thomastown was always a home to them, and Lady Elizabeth Mathew, Lord Llandaff's rather eccentric but able daughter, took a special fancy to "Toby," as the future apostle was called. It lasted into a lifelong friendship; and as she was grown up when Toby was christened, this woman of the world must have had a singular experience in watching the evolution of a saint.

The only things specially remarkable about the boy Toby were his unselfishness, his lack of taste for killing things, and his desire to give parties. He, too, like Goldsmith, was "a great lover of happy faces," and this was

his first expression of the passion. It led him into trouble at Maynooth, since he was expelled a year after he entered for giving a party in his rooms—such convivialities being strictly forbidden. He decided then to become a friar rather than a secular priest, and entered the Capuchin branch of the Franciscan Order. After being ordained, he began his ministrations at Kilkenny, but the bishop one day sent to the young priest as he sat in the confessional an order to cease his functions, because, contrary to rule, he had administered Holy Communion on Easter Day. The charge was untrue and was withdrawn with apologies, but Father Mathew preferred to be in another diocese and betook himself to Cork.

Here for nearly quarter of a century he ministered, and nobody out of Cork ever heard of him; but in Cork he was known to all. In those early days he had no gift as a preacher, his voice was weak and reedy when he spoke; but in the confessional the magic of his sympathy made itself felt. People flocked there. His biographer quotes the description given of him by one of his penitents: "The worse you are in the beginning, the better he'd like you; but if you didn't improve very soon, there's no usage too bad for you." Over and



above his sympathy was his bounty. "Give, give, give, have no fear of giving," was his lifelong counsel. It was better, he said, to give to nineteen fraudulent beggars, if there was one case in twenty that should not be turned away. "If the streets of Cork were paved with gold, and Father Mathew had control of them, there would not be a paving stone in Cork by the end of the year," said one who had worked with him; and no doubt there was sense in the saying. But he was not a mere indiscriminate flinger of alms: he had a conception, far in advance of his time, of what town life should be. In truth many of the financial troubles which were his curse sprang from attempting through private bounty what is now done by the State or the rates. Through his labours there was established an industrial school which soon had five hundred scholars. The best known of his works, however, was partly a measure of hygiene and partly of freedom. The burying ground was overcrowded, and it was controlled solely by the authorities of the Established Church. Feeling grew fierce when the Dean of Cork sent down a message to stop a Catholic dignitary from reading the funeral service at a burial, because the Dean's permission had not been

obtained. The whole thing was a cause of offence in more ways than one, and Father Mathew set to work and secured as a graveyard for the community at large what had been the Botanic Gardens. It is there that he lies himself, not in the family burying-place. His dust is with all the common dust of Cork, citizen with citizen.

There probably never was a man to whom it could have been more hateful to have sectarian controversies revived over a grave. He is the only Catholic priest I ever heard of who insisted again and again that he had been urged to his special mission by persons of another creed.

Up to 1838 he was simply a Franciscan friar, following the rule of that Order which exacts most humility. It should be observed, however, that he did not adhere to the practice of community life. At that time in Ireland, only just emerging from the penal laws, Catholic organisation was lax, and Franciscan though he was, Father Mathew always had servants to wait on him. For a very long period, there were a man and his wife and they had the character of old retainers. Once when the man had given offence—not for the first time—his master was heard to say to him indignantly: “John, if the like of this happens again, I will leave the house.”

He was indeed a master after his own fashion, just as he was a friar after his own fashion: but essentially in this earlier part of his life, he was an Irish priest, having many friends among the rich, and adored by the poor, yet in no way marked off from his fellows, except that in those days a Catholic priest come from the gentry was a rare figure. He had no austerity. Maguire, his biographer, tells how one of his friends, calling at night upon him, heard the sound of merriment as he climbed the rickety stair and entered a room where a dozen people sat round the long table over which Father Mathew presided: nor were there wanting glasses and the "materials." In short this priest till well on in middle age accepted the usages of his time, and whisky punch was as much a part of them in Ireland as wine is the life of France. It has been said of him that no one else ever understood so well the value of joy.

But he was a member of many public committees for prevention of misery; and at these the drink question would always crop up; and there was always in the corner a short, stout, exuberant Quaker (even Quakers had the stamp of Cork on their speech) who never failed to say: "Ah, Theobald Mathew, if thou wouldst take the matter up." The end was that Father

Mathew one night sent for William Martin, and William Martin came joyfully and was not disappointed. He had found his leader.

The first meeting was held in Father Mathew's schoolroom, and the priest having explained the purpose, with the blank roll before him, ended up his speech by saying: "So here goes"; and he signed his name first on a list that was to reach into millions. That was on April 10, 1838; and the propaganda started. William Martin proved to be right. When the poor of Cork found that Father Mathew was in the movement, they began to pay attention: it grew, and by December the signatories were 150,000, people flocking in from the country districts. The fame of it spread, and he was invited to come to Waterford, but decided to take Limerick on his way as the first stage of his missionary journey. No one was prepared for what happened. Crowds converged till the old town was choked to danger point. 150,000 people signed on here, and another 80,000 in Waterford. The apostle came back to Cork, having gained a quarter of a million adherents; and everywhere people clamoured for his presence. At Birr, as he sat in the chapel administering the pledge, a regiment was drawn up around the building with fixed bayonets to

keep back the crowd, lest people should trample each other to death in the effort to approach him. At Athy, as he travelled back from Dublin by mail coach, it became known that he was inside, and people poured out of the streets and blocked the way till he should accept their names and bless them. The mail was delayed five hours, and a protest was sent to the speculator who ran the mailcars: he answered it by giving Father Mathew a free pass to travel when and where he pleased on his work. For there was no doubt in men's minds during these early years but that the work was a blessed work. The drink bill fell and fell; so did the list of crimes. Twelve and a quarter million gallons of Irish whisky paid duty in 1839; five and a half million in 1844. Father Mathew had occasion to raise funds for the building of his church in Cork: Roe, the great whisky distiller in Dublin, sent him a large cheque, saying: "No man has ever done me such harm, but it is a small thing beside the good you have done my country."

Nor was there any distinction of creed in support. He went to Ulster against advice, for in the 'forties, sectarian feeling was more dangerous than now; and even now it is not negligible. But Ulster poured out to welcome

the friar. At Clones in Monaghan they hung out Orange flags in his honour. "That's the first time I saw an Orange flag," he said. "Three cheers for it." And the crowd cheered, Catholic and Protestant; and Catholics and Protestants were great friends for the three days Father Mathew was in Clones. He had his own way of looking at these matters. One man after signing got his blessing and stood up saying: "Ah, Father, if you knew what I am you'd not be blessing me: I'm an Orangeman." "God bless you, my dear" (he called everyone "my dear"), "I wouldn't care if you were a lemon man."

This genial humorous humanity no doubt accounted for much. But it would be idle to suppose that Father Mathew in 1839 was the same man as when he signed the roll that 10th of April, 1838. Things had happened incredibly through his agency; and it was not in his nature to attribute their happening to himself. Why they happened, how they had happened, might be understood if we really knew the psychology of crowds or the philosophy of miracles; but plainly enough a thing outside all ordinary human experience was taking place; furious wife-beating savages were being transformed into decent steady workmen; and to the chief agent in that happening it could only



seem that power was given him for a purpose. He accepted the fact of his power. Manifestly, he attached to the pledge a kind of miraculous power; for again and again he administered it to men actually drunken. "I will never refuse the pledge to anyone," he said, "and I find that people who come to me drunk keep the pledge." There is testimony that in many cases this happened. But when the multitudes sought to assign to him personally a supernatural power of healing, he told them plainly and publicly that he had no warrant to attempt this. "I will not refuse my blessing to them if they ask it: or rather I will pray God to bless them: I have heard Protestants do as much," he said. But he made it clear that, in his judgment, his blessing was no way different from the blessing of any devout priest. I do not think that he would have said that "the pledge" administered by him had not special efficacy; I do not see how he could have believed that. At all events all Ireland believed that the pledge, for its effect, could be administered only by him personally: that he was in that sense a vehicle of power created for this purpose.

In such conditions a man inevitably comes to feel that the necessities of the purpose which he serves override all other considerations;



and against such a conviction no ordinary will can stand. It was natural for his abounding affection to regard his kindred as part of himself, and natural to his selflessness to set aside their material interests, the cause compelling, exactly as he would have set aside his own.

Fate brought about a singularly dramatic moment when his two brothers, who were partners in a distillery, died in early middle age, leaving their children to Father Mathew's guardianship. This was at the height of his movement. "I cannot be associated with the carrying on of such a business," he said; and he shut down the distillery. Its plant was sold, and there are somewhere in the Midlands great vats, the remnant of that sale, with the name Mathew graven on them. No act could have been less justifiable at law; but such was his authority that no one gainsaid him. In one of the two families, the mother and her folk had means to make provision; in the other, responsibility for all was assumed by his brothers and passed to their sons. Fifty years later, his favourite nephew was still maintaining two old ladies whom this action had deprived of their small inheritance—or chance of inheritance. Yet whether in spite of him, or because of him, prosperity did not forsake the family.

He himself had quite early in the movement exhausted all his resources: more, he had involved himself deeply. For this he had some justification. Lady Elizabeth Mathew had become sole heiress of her father; she was unmarried, and she had talked repeatedly of making Father "Toby" her heir. He counted on it—for his beneficences. But when she realised that to leave Thomastown to Toby would be in reality making it over to the Franciscans, she changed her mind, and willed it to a French kinsman, the Comte de Jarnac. It is odd to reflect that if the Franciscans had got it, Thomastown would be to-day a monastery and a school and, anyhow, a centre of life, instead of what it is—a ruin. But at all events no money came to Father Mathew, and for great part of his career he was deeply in debt. At his own charges he had been conducting a vast propaganda—his printing bill was over £500 a year; and this was only one item among scores. Among them they left him over £7,000 in debt—at the very time when accusations were brought against him of acquiring huge sums by the sale of medals and the like. Finally he was arrested for debt: the bailiff had the brilliant idea of taking his place in the crowd that were signing the pledge; and as he knelt before the priest, he presented the writ.

Manifestly these money troubles of his must have weighed specially heavy on the household to which he was most attached, that of his brother Charles, who lived at Lehenagh, just outside Cork. Every day, if "the priest" did not dine with Charles Mathew, Charles dined with "the priest," and in the household "the priest's" will was law. The eldest of his nephews was then a clever boy, going to Mr. Porter's school in Cork, which had trained many fine scholars (Father Mathew's code had nothing in it against sending the Catholic boy to school among Protestants). One day James Mathew, then fifteen, came back and said to his uncle: "The boys say I ought to go to Trinity." "Do they, my dear? Very well. You shall go to Trinity." James's father was then away on a tour of inspection, and when he came back was told simply what "the priest" had decided. And it was "the priest" who took the boy up to the University and settled him into his rooms. But before they presented themselves at the College gate, something crossed Father Mathew's mind. "What kind of a handkerchief have you, James? A spotted handkerchief. That won't do at all when you go in among the young men in Trinity."

My father was one of "the young men", and one of those who valued an early friendship with

the future Lord Justice. Those who remember Sir James Mathew at the bar or on the Bench, or at the head of the pleasantest table I ever sat at in London, can make to themselves some picture of what Father Mathew was like: an old daguerreotype shows almost exactly the same profile.

Nothing in all that I have read or been told gives me a happier impression than the story of the old "Apostle of Temperance" taking the young scholar to college and seeing him properly kitted out. But the year in which James Mathew was taken to Trinity must have been the last happy year of "the priest's" life; for early in 1846 came the beginnings of famine, which grew and grew. At first people doubted the extent of ruin, and in Liverpool, where Father Mathew had held a great mission, the Rathbones, leaders in good works, wrote to the Irishman they most trusted. Father Mathew answered: "Come and see." They came; and after they had seen, a ship full of grain was chartered by them for Cork. But for all the bounty that was poured out—and nothing gives one so high an idea of the active compassion shown as Father Mathew's letters—it was like throwing buckets of water on a conflagration that has taken hold. Those months killed O'Connell: Father Mathew lived through

them, but they broke him. He had always said: "I am the strongest man in Ireland," and Thackeray, who saw him, described him as forty-two when he was ten years older. But there was a double strain on him now: the temperance mission never ceased, but the labour of the soup-kitchen overrode it. And in the temperance mission he had been lifted up on the wings of achievement, not with pride but with joy. It was then as if the angels had come into a fight on earth and he was on the side of the angels, and winning. Now in this fight, and indeed in both fights, the victory was too evidently turning to the other camp. Life had gone out of the temperance movement: how should there be vitality among all that death? As for the soup-kitchens and the grain ships, his personal exertion probably saved the lives of hundreds, but the dead accumulated in heaps about him. His cemetery had to be closed in June, 1848: ten thousand corpses had been put into it within nine months. Here is an incident that stamps the time and the man. A rich youth, not yet of age, to whom Father Mathew had been kind, came to ask what should be done with a half-starved child that he had found in the fields, asleep in the arms of its dead mother. "God sent you that child.

You can't do better than rear it," was the answer; and the lad, though dismayed, did as he was bidden. Long before this, Father Mathew had turned to his brother and said: "We can keep nothing while people are dying of hunger," and once again no one challenged his sentence. Everything was given away that they had to give.

At the very climax of the struggle, in Lent of 1848, as he rose from bed early, his feet failed under him: it was paralysis. Yet by August of that year he was back again, fighting death, but not with the same resources. Mr. Rathbone expressed it in a sentence. His presence had conveyed by some mysterious means the sense of goodness and of power. "After his attack the impression of goodness was the same, but the power was gone."

By 1849, most of those who had to die of famine or famine fever had finished dying: emigration was still clearing the decks, and the afflux of Irish to America gave a new impetus to his desire to carry his mission across the Atlantic. He went and remained for one year, but there was no uninterrupted triumph: he was called on to take sides about the issue of slavery, and could not, without closing the South to his ministrations. Perhaps no complication so difficult had ever met him, and he



was not the man he had been. He came back to Ireland and found many of the Temperance Rooms had been shut down; the bands (which he had subsidised) were broken up. Outside Cork he was no longer a force; but in Cork the poor still flocked about him. Yet the years which remained were a slow ebbing of his faculties. The time came when he had to give up saying his daily Mass: and in this last stage he went out to Queenstown and there tottered, white-haired and infirm, about the streets. Even in those days the ruling passion for happy faces lasted: his brother one afternoon came down to spend the evening with him and found the table spread for a party: he had lent his room to a schoolboy to entertain his friends. Probably no one ever was born with more capacity for innocent happiness; but when the end came in 1856, instead of the serenity that so often smooths out a tortured visage, pain flooded the dead face. The affection of every day, the craving, never balked, for pleasure in giving, were only the surface ripples: terrible deep waters ran under, in the soul which had exulted in victory on the side of the angels, and then so far as human sense could reach, had seen the angels routed and death scattering dismay.

Yet in the memory of him which has come



down in the household which would have been nearest to his living care there is no trace of this tragedy. He has been somehow long, long after his death, present and pervading and felt in the atmosphere of a home where happiness has always seemed to me more gracious than I have known it elsewhere. What is actually remembered of him there is now only by tradition; for Sir James Mathew passed out of this life long years ago, and the mother of his children never saw "the priest." But what she heard, not from one but from many, she sums up by saying that, for all his gentleness, when he entered a room, it was natural for those in it to kneel. And I am sure that those who preserve this memory would say that the angels were not beaten.

After this study was first published, one who speaks with authority on such matters wrote: "I believe some people used to be able to certify that Father Mathew worked miracles. He is here called a saint. I think I should rather call him a transcendently great hero, because he did so much with the wild olive—that is, with what is good in human *nature*. Saints are primarily *super-natural*."

Let us leave it at that.

# A BIBLE CHRISTIAN



## VIII

### A BIBLE CHRISTIAN

THE Protestant churches or communions do not present candidates for beatification, that half-way house to sainthood: if they did, there should be a strong case for putting forward claims on behalf of a modern missionary who, like St. Patrick, came to Ireland as a foreigner from a wholly alien civilisation. There the resemblance stops. To begin with, Mrs. Asenath Nicholson was a woman; next, unlike Patrick, she was no foundress, no organiser. He came with the authority of Rome behind him; she from America with no mandate to go on, except her own. Protestantism in her took the form of an individualism so intense as to be almost anarchic. No church satisfied her, she does not appear to have continued within any denomination, though her heart went out to the Quakers for their seemly life and their modest beneficence and to the Methodists for the heartiness of their devotion. But if no

church contented, none repelled her—not even, though she was bred in New England, the Church of Rome. On the course of her self-imposed mission she came to know the Catholic Irish so well that her description of them and their way of life is probably the most enlightening document concerning Ireland as it was before the Great Famine;\* yet the only link between her and them was Christianity, which so much oftener divides than brings together. Save for this one link, she and they were as wide as the poles asunder.

She was born in the last years of the eighteenth century, brought up as a Baptist in Vermont, became a school teacher and married a New York merchant. There is no record that she had children, and, married or single, she remained spiritually an old maid. The schoolmarm was ingrained into the fibre of her. It seems to many Europeans that to be married to an American woman is a discipline, and nothing tempts a male reader to envy Mr. Nicholson. Whether Mrs. Asenath developed all her doctrines and practices during connubial life is uncertain; when we become acquainted with her in the year 1843, she was

\*It was called *Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger*; but a condensed edition has recently been published under the title "*The Bible in Ireland*."

a widow of long standing, and she was by that time an abstainer who refused not only alcohol but tea and coffee.—Tea, she has left it on record in one of her later publications (*Nature's Book*, a treatise on diet) is capable of giving its users delirium tremens. Pepper and all spices she condemned; but this did not interpose any barrier between her and the objects of her mission in Ireland, who scarcely knew the names of these condiments; and as a vegetarian who would not even touch eggs or butter she was singularly qualified to be at ease in houses where the only food was potatoes, where milk was a luxury, and bread was offered as it might have been plum cake. But she abhorred even more than alcohol what poor men, and poor women too, in Ireland called "the blessed tobacco," and this made for estrangement. Also, she had the New England passion for cleanliness, and that desire for preaching sanitation which has not deserted her fellow-countrywomen; and she was prudish to excess, in a land where the tiny cottages jumbled together old and young of both sexes.

Such was the person who in 1844, arrayed in bonnet and bearskin muff, with a parasol in one hand and a Bible in the other, undertook

to journey through Ireland, huddled among cattle-drovers on outside cars or, quite as often, tramping the long public roads without money enough to go to a decent hotel, and getting her shelter in some wayside shebeen, or in a cabin where pigs shared the shelter.

Yet through all her fads and prejudices and her prepossessions, this generous woman saw clear to the heart of the matter, understood the reality of a religion which was not hers, and gave to poor and untaught strangers the compassion of an equal. If she is ever harsh beyond reason, it is in her censure of the rich, and still more of the respectable and officially godly. She never relaxed—how could she?—her abhorrence of dirt and disorder; but she makes us aware of the essential cleanliness of soul that was often found amid squalor in Ireland. Even the material squalor is fairly depicted; she is quick to say that when the pig lived indoors, the pig was taught to be mannerly as the dog or cat, had its own plate, and went to it. And though Mrs. Nicholson was horrified unreasonably whenever she saw “the wine giving its colour to the cup,” she proclaimed gladly that Catholic Ireland, Ireland of the poor, had put up a great fight



against drink. "This heaven-inspired movement of temperance in Ireland not only owes its special origin to the Papists, but is continued and supported mostly by them." She thought that Father Mathew, then at the height of his power, was the only famous man who, after she had met him, seemed greater than his fame. Of him she says, "He has wiped more tears from the face of woman than any other being on the globe, except the Lord Jesus."

The tone of authority is not the least characteristic part of that utterance. Very easily this little woman blazes up into the utterance of a prophetess nourished on the English Bible, whose language colours all her speech. Yet when she makes her own English, it has a classic distinction, worthy of Dr. Johnson at his best. Listen to her as she defines her own purpose in visiting Ireland, so many of whose folk, already crowded to the doors of New England.

"Often when seated at my fireside, I have told those most dear to my heart that God will allow me one day to sit down in their cabins and there learn what soil has nurtured, what hardships have disciplined, a race so patient and so impetuous, so revengeful and

so forgiving, so proud and so humble, so obstinate and so docile, so witty and so simple."

Adventures began from the moment she landed at Kingstown; for within half an hour she had lost her pocket-book containing all her money and such credentials as she carried, and it was brought back to her by "an old man in ragged garb." She rejoiced over "so early a proof of Irish honesty," for she had been given to understand that if not murdered outright she would certainly be robbed. Within the next quarter of an hour she had lost her railway ticket to Dublin, and then her keys. The keys were recovered and she proceeded to rate the railway clerk, who insisted on a second shilling for a new ticket. But when he told her that she should be well contented, having found her pocket-book, she submitted and "determined to learn better manners in future." She was, however, not prone to accept such a lesson.

Dublin gave her, as it still can give, a foretaste of the destitution which is to be found in great perfection among the Irish poor; and she was not long in finding out that the respectable middle-classes regarded her with not very friendly amusement and some disapprobation.

She was to meet true hospitality in Ireland, but the best of it came from the poor. It must be said that she was not meek under mockery, nor slow to lift up her parable in reproof: yet gleams of insight on occasion visited her. On a journey in Wicklow she sat by a Roman Catholic, also travelling by "the Radical" (for coaches had their colours then and "the Conservative," she was told, would be the more crowded). This gentleman conversed with her about Repeal and seemingly about other matters. "He was well skilled in the doctrines of his church, but complaisant and patient under contradiction." She had, no doubt, tried him highly.

Her first journeys, to King's County and to Wicklow and Wexford, showed her no more than any observant tourist might have seen; but it was very different when she set out for Kilkenny to visit the parents of "nine servant-girls, all from the same parish" who had lived with her in New York. As she drove from Urlingford a man perched on the luggage above her, on hearing her ask for "the widow H.", bent over and said, "Are you not Mary H.'s mistress?"

Then there was "such an outcry" that the visitor was "at first positively alarmed";

and on alighting she was taken to the house of a man "calling himself a doctor" who begged (but vainly) the privilege of removing a wart from her face by "saying a few words over it." He was, however, permitted to send her in his car, which proved to be a dray with a peat kish on it. Seated on the bottom of this cart, with her back to the horse and her companions squatting beside her, she was brought to the door where she had her first taste of cabin life in Ireland.

It was the Ireland which Lever described so often, in a spirit of grotesque comedy, and which Trollope has drawn with Dutch fidelity in his earliest novels. Where there are now four million people, eight million then crowded the ground; three-fourths of them depended on the supply of one root which was dug in September or October, and which would not always keep for a full twelvemonth, even if the stock held out. There can never have been in the history of the world a more widespread or more utter poverty.

The household to which she came was not of the poorest; its head was a widow with two grown up sons and a grandson, and they sat at their meal of potatoes and buttermilk; but within three years the daughter, then Mrs.

Nicholson's maid, had sent them home forty pounds from her wages, and this "had not only kept her mother in tea and bread but had given them all the blessed tobacco besides." The missionary with all her eccentricities must have been a kind mistress, for early next morning another of the girls whom she had employed was at the door and fell on her neck and wept. "And do I see you? And what can we do for you in this humble place?" But the word had gone abroad and the whole parish was in a stir. "They talked of building bonfires: they talked of uniting and buying a sheep to kill, though not one had eaten a dinner of flesh since Christmas. The grey-headed and the little child were there, to welcome me, to thank me for thinking of the like of such poor bodies."

That was what touched them, more than gifts could have done—that one should have come from across the ocean to visit them in kindness of heart; and all their thought was how to repay her kindness. Two children begged leave to go a day's journey to look for fruit and came back with all they could procure—two pears and a spoonful of blackberries. All were distressed that they could do so little; but they had their own idea.

“The next morning Anne again called to say she had been sent to invite me to attend a field dance which was to be on the next day, the Sabbath. In surprise I was about to answer, when Anne said, ‘I knew you would not, and told them so, but they begged I would say they had no other day, as all were at work, and sure God wouldn’t be hard upon ’em, when they had no other time, and could do nothing else for the stranger.’ I thanked them heartily for their kind feelings, and declined. Judge my confusion, when about sunset on Sabbath evening, just after returning from Johnstown, where I had attended church, the cabin door opened, and a crowd of all ages walked in, decently attired for the day; and without the usual welcomes or any apology, the hero who first introduced me seated himself at my side, took out his flute, wet his fingers, saying, ‘This is for you, Mrs. N., and what will you have?’ A company was arranged for the dance, and so confounded was I that I only murmured, ‘I cannot tell.’ He struck up an Irish air, and the dance began. I had nothing to say, taken by surprise as I was; my only strength was to sit still.

“The dance finished, the eldest son of my hostess advanced, made a low bow, and invited



me to lead the next dance. I looked on his glossy black slippers, his blue stockings snugly fitted up to the knee, his corduroys above them, his blue coat and brass buttons, and had no reason to hope that, at my age of nearly half a century, I could ever expect another like offer. However, I was not urged to accept it. Improper as it might appear, it was done as a civility, which, as a guest in his mother's house and a stranger, he thought and all thought (as I was afterwards told) he owed me. The cabin was too small to contain the three-score and ten who had assembled, and with one simultaneous movement, without speaking, all rushed out, bearing me along, and placed me upon a cart before the door, the player at my right hand. And then an amazing dance began. Not a laugh—not a loud word was heard; but as soberly as though they were in a funeral procession they danced for an hour, wholly for my amusement, and for my welcome. Then each approached, gave me the hand, bade me God-speed, leaped over the stile, and in stillness walked away. It was a true and hearty Irish welcome, in which the aged as well as the young participated."

That is a picture of an Ireland which has now vanished. Irish was still spoken by perhaps



half the people, though English seems to have been generally used in Kilkenny. But again and again in her story she stops to tell how Irish children learnt to dance almost before they were standing on their feet. This Puritan had the grace to see nothing in the custom but what was gracious; the artist in her responded. Here is a companion picture, sketched in Kerry, on the strand outside O'Connell's house of Darrynane. Women were gathering seaweed for manure, and the stranger fell into talk with one of them about her gathering which must sometimes last for scores of days:

“ ‘And all you have for your labour is the potato?’

“ ‘That's all, ma'am, that's all; and it's many of us that can't get the sup of milk with 'em, nor the salt; but we can't help it, we must be content with what the good God sends us.’

“ She hitched her basket over her shoulder, and in company with one older than herself skipped upon the sand made wet with rain, and turning suddenly about, gave me a pretty specimen of Kerry dancing, as practised by the peasantry.

“ ‘The sand is too wet, ma'am, to dance right well on,’ and again shouldering her

basket, with a 'God speed ye in yer journey,' leaped away. . . .

"This woman, who danced before me, was more than fifty, and I do not believe that the daughter of Herodias herself was more graceful in her movements, more beautiful in complexion or symmetry, than was this dark-haired matron of the mountains of Kerry."

The visit to the South-East of Ireland, well inhabited and by comparison fully civilised, took her to other doors than those of the poor. But the landlords, or the rich farmers, and their womenkind had no welcome for the "American lady" and sent her coldly on her way. "Not a cabin in all Ireland would have treated a stranger thus," is her comment. The Quakers, when she fell in with them, made up for it, and in their houses she found not only a clean bed in a spotless room, but the luxury of her life—apples on the table with good bread.

Her first tour, though it extended into Connaught, was only a journey of exploration; and on her return to Dublin she found a more definite purpose. Those to whom she wished to go would take no money from her, and she resolved to give them books. The Hibernian Bible Society provided her with "a good

selection of tracts on practical piety, school books and English and Irish Testaments."

Now, on the face of things, this form of beneficence was the most likely in the world to excite suspicion among those to whom she found so easy access; for at this period there was a strong and organised attempt in progress to spread Protestantism among the Irish poor; and it was backed by arguments so material that Catholic Ireland bristled with anger at the very name of a "Bible Reader." Still, the missionary went out under good auspices for she made her way first to Cork, where she knew the hospitality of Father Mathew—and not his only. "The kindness of the people of Cork will be had in everlasting remembrance," she says in one emphatic paragraph—speaking as one who has the right to pronounce.

By Father Mathew's counsel and direction she went to Bantry, to Glengariff and to Killylarney—trudging along, weighted down with the bags of books that were strung about her; meeting sometimes with angry opposition from people who told her that she carried "the same books the Protestant man had, to put down the Church and speak against its religion," yet often finding children eager to get what

she promised them—"the Word of God"; scrambling alone in mountain fastnesses, where she risked her bones on dangerous rocks, and found people housed like foxes among the stones under scraws of sod thrown over sticks: and ever and always she was cheered by the beauty of human kindness. On the road to Cahirciveen beyond Killarney, she was spent with walking, and got guidance to a crowded stage house, crammed with teamsters, where geese and hens were on the floor among the family, and a cow with her calf was fastened near the fire.

"My feet needing bathing, the pot which had been used for the boiling of the potatoes was presented, and in presence of the ten male eye-witnesses gathered about, the girl of the house washed my feet in spite of all remonstrance, the father and mother urging my consent as being a duty to a 'wairy stranger.' While this was in progress, the father whispered a second daughter to 'put on the feather bed for the lady' and in a half-hour my bedroom was in readiness, with another splinter of bog-wood put into a crack to light me on the way thither. This bedroom contained three beds for father and mother, three daughters, and myself. I was allowed to retire first, the

same attendant standing by me in primitive fashion, to help me undress."

But the strangest of all her story to one who knows Ireland, is that wherever she went, she was allowed to make return for her entertainment in her own way. As they had given her music and dancing, so she gave them Bible reading: and they listened to the Scripture story for long hours together and rejoiced in it. We have only her own word for that, but so often she mentions objections that were made, and heaps of controversies raised, that it is but fair to believe her when she tells of a success that had in it nothing controversial. She got advice from friendly Catholics as to what part of her stock might raise suspicion, and she was not too stubborn to take the counsel. Also, beyond doubt her instinct guided her to those chapters which could most win hearts by their tenderness and by their beauty. The Fourteenth of John was her favourite opening; and among these children of want she read out: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you."

But the truth appears from many things in her book that they saw and believed for the very work's sake. They knew her to be a child of prosperity, as they were children of

want, and they saw her putting hardship on herself beyond measure and accepting the shelter of the poorest; they interpreted the action in their own way, and were convinced that she was a holy woman, going on penance for her soul's sake. That they could understand. As she journeyed along by Dingle Bay from the stage house where her feet were washed beside the cow and its calf at the fire, hunger came on her, for she had eaten nothing for many hours, and she went into a cabin to buy bread. There was none, and none to be got for miles, so she learnt from a girl, the only person who could speak English,

“ ‘ But wouldn't ye stop and have a potato? they will boil in a little bit.' While these were boiling I read the Testament, the girl interpreting to the mother, who in tears of gratitude was expressing her admiration both at the reading and at the goodness of God, Who had suffered a saint going on pilgrimage, as she thought, to enter her humble cabin. ‘ She's crying, ma'am, because she can't do as much for her soul as you.' Here, as in many parts of the country, it was difficult to make them believe that I was not some holy St. Bridget going on penance.



“ I gave some books to the children who came in, and offered the woman a little money for her hospitality; she thrust it back giving a frown of half anger and half grief, and the daughter said, ‘ She gave ye the potatoes in the name of God, and d’ye think we’d take money for it?’ ”

That extract gives the pith of her whole book. If more has to be added, her own words are best—

“ To the Roman Catholics, both duty and inclination require that I should acknowledge a deep debt of gratitude. They have opened the doors of convents, of schools, of mansions, and cabins, without demanding letters, or distrusting those that were presented. They have sheltered me from storm and tempest; they have warmed and fed me without fee or reward, when my Protestant brethren and sisters frowned me away. God will remember this, and I will remember it.”

She had a right to remember it. On one of her journeys, she reached Banagher, footsore and weary in the dark.

“ At last I found myself upon the bridge, and discovered a lodging-house, where I told the people I had but sixpence-halfpenny in my purse, and could only get a night’s lodging



and two or three potatoes. 'And that you will get; and a week's lodging an' welcome. Not a ha'p'orth of them two crippled feet shall go out of my house till they're hailed,' answered the man. The servant was called to fetch water and bathe my feet, 'And we'll do what we can for ye, the cratur'!' These people were kind to a fault. They were Catholics, but they listened to the Word of Life with the most profound attention, and without any opposition. They told their neighbours they fully believed I was inspired by God to come to Ireland, and do them good. What was this good? Certainly not money, and this they well knew."

The book from which these quotations have been made does not tell the reader how Mrs. Asenath Nicholson's mission was finally justified, nor how she got her wish to do service to the Irish poor. Yet she has related the story; but her editor wisely refrains from drawing on those experiences. In the year 1845 while she was moving about Ireland as a Bible reader, self-commissioned, the potato blight began: in 1846 it fell with full weight, and year after year through that decade it recurred and the flesh melted off the people. It is literally true that Ireland could scarcely bury its dead

during that awful visitation, and while famine lasted and the fever that goes with famine, the little American woman laboured among her Irish, distributing relief from America, organising, shepherding, admonishing, scolding, and stripping herself to the last penny of money and the last necessities of clothing. That was her reward, and no better could have been asked for her. Then when the stress was over she went back to New England and continued to write her queer, cranky books telling the world how delicious a dish may be made out of carrots or parsnips, without the cannibal contagion of meat juice or abominable greasiness of butter. In daily life she would have been hard to put up with; even her courage was not endearing, for although she climbed Croaghpatrick in a storm against all warnings, she was by her own representation pitifully incompetent on any kind of difficult ground. Those who pulled her out of bad places which she should never have gone near had their work cut out; one thing stood to them, however, that nothing could frighten this vegetarian pacifist. She should have been the wife of Mr. Shaw's Androcles.

Nor again is it specially lovable in her that she should have been touched by the poverty

of Ireland, for she saw things there even before the famine that might have drawn tears from a stone if it had not been a stone accustomed to such contacts; nor even that she should have spent herself in the effort to help, when necessity was as urgent as that of ship-wrecked seamen. But that she, bred as she was to regard Roman Catholicism as a degrading superstition, should have come among Catholics, bred to regard Protestantism as hostile and oppressive, and that across all these barriers her native goodness should have pierced straight to the native goodness in them; that her religion should have stripped itself of all that was not essential to find and join all that was essential in theirs—that indeed is a sort of miracle.

The secret of her success is perhaps that she went to the poor in Ireland, being ready not only to give—that is so easy—but to accept. Her scorn of rich hospitality is matched by her adoration of the poor man's bounty; and though it is straining language to call her humble, she had always a noble eagerness to come under obligation to a willing giver. That is the surest mark of friendship, and that was how the poor knew her as their friend.

When the day came for her to leave Ireland, she slipped away quietly, avoiding those folk

of her own class who would have pressed ceremonial on her. "I was glad that the poor could not find me," she adds: "for these I had laboured, and I had their blessing: that was my rich reward."

# A MAYNOOTH PROFESSOR



## IX

### A MAYNOOTH PROFESSOR

EVERY autobiography is a confession, but now and then one is a confession of faith; and this is surely true of the *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor* in which Dr. Walter McDonald recorded the experiences and struggles of his life. In it we assist at the stages of a fight prolonged over a quarter of a century and not ended yet; one of the strangest conflicts in its kind.

McDonald's entire adult life was spent in training men for the priesthood, and for more than thirty years he held the most important teaching post at Maynooth. Yet his first published book was placed on the Index, and permission to issue his later works on theology was denied. There surely never was a more paradoxical career. It would be matter for mockery if so much pain had not come from the dislocation.

Walter McDonald was, like most Irish priests, reared on a farm; his father held about a hundred acres in Kilkenny. Some of his kindred, already priests, helped with the education, which



he describes affectionately yet critically; for the purpose of his life was to broaden Irish education, more specially at Maynooth. This book is a document on Ireland—written with that simplicity and directness instilled into him by Father Gowan, “who,” says the Memoir with sudden special emphasis, “by God’s Providence, came to us at the beginning of my Second Year’s Divinity.”

It is a document for all kinds of readers for this professor of theology was always a citizen, and many of his views touch questions of citizenship—especially the relations of clergy and laity. Anti-clerical he was not; but he was always on the side of freedom. When some influences prompted the Vatican to issue a circular discouraging (but not forbidding) subscriptions to the Parnell testimonial, five Maynooth professors sent in money publicly over their joint names. One was Walter McDonald; another, his lifelong friend Patrick O’Donnell, later Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh.

But, of course, the main central interest is theological; and it amazes me that I should be interested. He was for long the friend of me and mine, and my son, as his chosen literary executor, prepared his “reminiscences” for publication; but in all my many talks with him, nothing was said of his central preoccupation.

No human being was ever more frank: the vivid quality of this book lies in its perfect candour. But he was also reticent. He never spoke of his grievances. We have them now: in essence, they come to the denial of his liberty of teaching. This is a public matter for which he now secures that discussion which the law of obedience denied him during life. Yet in what cut deeper and nearer than any denial, he still keeps silence. That his whole life was a struggle to retain faith he lets us see; but there is no exposure of his soul. What stands out clear is that he only won through by discarding much that to his mind was unbelievable; and that he fought through life, and was defeated, in a struggle to save others from what he endured.

His troubles began when, after his student time he went from Maynooth to be a professor of philosophy in the diocesan seminary at Kilkenny. "Does unhappiness," he asks in passing, "always begin with real life?" Yet unhappiness was not natural to him; big, strong, good-humoured and friendly, he was always surrounded by friends. In middle age at all events he was like a west wind blowing across peatbogs, gentle even in its roughness, tonic but not harsh. But in his youth at Kilkenny he was lonely and unhappy, and troubled, feeling defenceless against the scruples which

assailed him, until, after he had returned to Maynooth and the chair of Theology, "revelation" came to him through Mivart's *Primer of Philosophy*."

"The authors whom I had been reading hitherto wrote as if the errors which they refuted made no present appeal, at least to a man of good sense and good faith. . . . Here, however, was what was being said every day quite near us; not by lunatics, or demons, but by men of great scientific attainments who deemed it a duty to say what they said. . . . It was the beginning of a new life—the life which I have led ever since, and which I am likely to lead while I live at all—the only life worth living, apart from the service of God, which may be found in any life to which He calls us."

It was in 1888—then aged 34—that he became "Prefect of the Dunboyne," charged with the training of those picked students—apparently not more than a class of seven or eight in all—who, after the normal course of seven years, stay on for another three. His teaching consisted in a series of conferences in which difficulties were propounded by the students and discussed in class. "This meant putting my own conscientious view of the question—whatever it was—before the students." And by this time he had decided that the conclusions of the science of theology

largely depended for their truth on natural science. Consequently, where the natural science from which scholastic theology had argued was in error, the old conclusions must be changed.

So early as 1894 formal exception was taken by another professor to some aspects of his teaching; and to define the ground which he had taken McDonald wrote and published his first book on *Motion*. This work was officially 'delated,'—that is, reported to authorities as censorable—and on examination was condemned. Through regard for Maynooth and the author, the decree was not formally published; but he was ordered to withdraw all copies from publication, to renounce the opinions therein contained, and to abstain from teaching them. So long as he remained in the Church, he was bound to obedience, and the copies were called in; but, was he bound to resign?—

"I was resolved to comply strictly with the commands of my ecclesiastical superiors; I was no less resolved to know precisely what I was to avoid, and to teach nothing but what I believed to be true."

The end of the matter was, in sum, this: He might teach opinions already taught or admitted as tenable, even though such opinions appeared to imply his own theory of Motion,

in regard to vital activity and free will. But he might not convey in teaching that these opinions were to be explained on his theory.

Under this compromise he continued to hold his most responsible position. His book makes it plain that he rejected parts of the traditional philosophy—more and more as time went on; and yet “satisfied himself” that “the main lines of the traditional argument and conclusions received a new strength from the so much clearer teaching of natural science on which they depend.” The question of error in the Bible disturbed him even more. “It was only by God’s great mercy I did not altogether renounce the faith; as I fear I should have done ultimately had I not satisfied myself of the truth—or the tenability—of more liberal principles than those in which I was brought up.”

“I satisfied myself.” The phrase has a Protestant ring, though coming from a Maynooth professor. That in itself would not have troubled Dr. McDonald. He praised the Presbyterians for their refusal to admit any degree of State control in ecclesiastical appointments; he pointed to the action of all Protestant churches in publishing open accounts of all their funds as worthy and even necessary to be imitated by his own Church; he advocated the right of local committees to be

associated with the clergy in the management of schools—another Protestant-sounding theory. All these were matters on which he could speak freely, though to speak in this sense was to oppose the hierarchy and to block all chances of preferment. But he wanted no preferment—neither one of the bishoprics to which his juniors on the staff of Maynooth passed on, nor the Presidency or Vice-Presidency. He wanted liberty to discuss and defend the modifications of traditional belief which he thought necessary in the cause of truth. He did not get it. He was defeated. Some of his actions and writings were, he admits, “imprudence.” “But my whole life has been an act of faith in such imprudences—a protest against the selfish prudence that will make no sacrifice for the right.”

For the next thirteen years after the condemnation of his first book, he continued to write books on theological subjects, and publication continued to be forbidden; yet he remained at his post. Why he was allowed to retain it is not difficult to answer. For one thing he was honestly loved by some of those among the bishops who sat in judgment on him—notably by the great man who afterwards became Cardinal Logue’s successor at Armagh. But chiefly he was not the kind of man to drive



into a corner. Whoever dealt with him wisely—and some of them were wise—must have known that he would carry submission only so far as his sense of loyalty dictated. Push him beyond that, and another more elemental loyalty would take control. He was indeed—it was his tragedy—caught between two loyalties, the higher and the lower; and these make terrible mill stones. They would have ground him to powder but that he always knew his ultimate allegiance. If he were squeezed so tight between the demands of truth and the demands of discipline that one or other must go, it was all over with discipline. But the ultimate surrender was never asked of him; he was never called on to repudiate even one jot or tittle of truth as he saw it, in his own soul.

It might have been asked. Part of his life's tragedy was that he lived in terror lest it should be demanded, and, worst of all, by his own honest judgment. As he saw it, a part of the teaching of his Church (though he would have said 'the Church') was definite, not admitting discussion. If a Catholic came to hold tenets irreconcilable with this definite teaching, he must in honour and conscience cease to call himself a Catholic. "It was hypocritical and mean," he writes, "of Loisy and Tyrrell to pretend to remain within the Church." Had



he felt himself obliged, then, to accept the conclusions which they accepted, he would have felt bound to accept severance; and he had to face this possibility all through his life.

"I say now very solemnly," he writes in this posthumous Memoir, "that the conservatism in which I was trained very nearly drove me out of the Church on many occasions, or into a madhouse, and that the good easy men who for the honour of God would in the interests of religion insist on these traditional views—making dogmas of what are but school traditions, are tormenting souls and driving them out of the Church." And again: "It was only by God's great mercy that I did not altogether renounce the faith, as I fear I should have done ultimately had I not satisfied myself of the truth—or the tenability—of more liberal principles than those in which I was brought up."

The gravest of his internal troubles seem to have concerned Bible criticism rather than the metaphysical points on which his teaching was condemned: he was never challenged on the issues which might have forced him to a break and he did not seek to raise them. For if truth held his ultimate allegiance, the loyalty of discipline was immediate. He had not the fussy zeal which should make him feel that

truth was betrayed unless he rushed to the rescue. Truth could be revealed, he felt, without his disclosure; his hand was not essential; but he must do nothing to hide truth. "I was resolved to comply strictly," he writes, "with the commands of my ecclesiastical superiors, but I was no less resolved . . . to teach nothing but what I believed to be true."

This meant in practice that he would and might teach (on the authority of others) opinions already taught without challenge, even though they seemed to him to imply his own theory of motion which he had been forbidden to teach; but he must not teach that their opinions were to be explained as his theory.

Outside a theological school no teacher would accept or be asked to accept such limitations; yet Dr. McDonald did not regard it as unreasonable that there should be limitations in a school of theology. There was, however, a field left for advance. Theology in great part depended on physical science and therefore must develop with the progress of that other knowledge. His service to truth lay chiefly in seeking to keep the field open for development as large as possible. He had made his fight by the appeal to Rome and it had gone against him: and he conformed to discipline

just as an officer in battle may under orders act against his own judgment. But in these matters nothing is settled once and for all: he believed it possible, and even probable, that the decision of discipline would alter: that Maynooth would one day find itself proud to be the college where the author had taught who wrote the book on *Motion*. In view of that day, he sat down and wrote his other works, believing them to be true and consistent with Catholic faith, yet knowing that the Censor would refuse permission to publish: and these he did not even submit to the censorship. A fourth he wrote, choosing out what he thought might pass, and it also was banned. All these works then he left in guardianship ready to be published when they might obtain license: but for his final task he undertook the story of what he had done. In these Memoirs he makes his final appeal; and he does not make it to Rome alone.

Some, who were competent to judge in such matters, have said that Dr. McDonald over-estimated the importance of his book on *Motion* and that the poverty of his intellectual training rendered him unequal to discern where the essence lay in this discussion. That is possible, and is of no interest to persons like myself. The essence of McDonald's life is

concerned with a defence of the liberty of teaching; and that is not a matter for the special competence of metaphysical theologians. The book which he has left us is no doubt specially addressed to Catholics, and even more specially to Catholic ecclesiastics: but it is one which a layman who is not a Catholic can read with comprehension of its central meaning and with the sympathy that prompts to take a hand. For in this book a dead man renews his battle: he bequeaths a fight. If we cannot help, we can at least cheer on the combatant; we can praise him for his humility and for his pride, for his submission and for his resistance. Those who knew him will know that in this book he does himself less than justice: the sweetness and the gaiety of his disposition are obscured in it, and none would guess from reading it, how close was his reticence upon his personal grievances. But what matters is that a man who stood for a lifetime tied to the stake tells us why he neither broke away by violence nor surrendered. Why he did not surrender, indeed, we are not told explicitly, but the impossibility is implicit in every line of the book: he was not of the surrendering kind. The other choice created a formidable case of conscience: we from outside can only know that he did not choose the easiest way.

# A MOTHER



## X

### A MOTHER

MRS. OLIPHANT died a few days after Queen Victoria's second jubilee. Her first novel, *Margaret Maitland*, was published in 1849. Her life's work covered a period of fifty years, and in that space of time she gave to the world upwards of two hundred and fifty volumes. Her miscellaneous contributions to *Blackwood's Magazine* and other periodicals not reprinted might probably fill another fifty. From the time she was twenty to her death in her seventieth year she wrote on an average at least six volumes a year—one every two months. A journalist in full work turns out printed matter at about the same rate, but few maintain the flow of it over so long a period, and Mrs. Oliphant's work never fell below the level of the very best journalism. It is no figure of speech to say that she wrote her fingers to the bone. "I have worked a hole in my right forefinger," she wrote to Mr. Blackwood in



October, 1896, "with the pen, I suppose! and can't get it to heal—also from excessive use of that little implement." That seems to have been the first thing that interfered with her amazing flow of production; the frame wore out before the mind, though that, too, had lost something of its freshness. Few writers have had at their disposal a more serviceable brain; none ever used one more unsparingly. Yet the end of all this work and of all this ability was failure.

The saddest part of her failure is that it was only relative and partial. She accomplished a great deal, she achieved a large measure of success, she knew much happiness; but she had always the feeling that she might have done more, that her success was not equal to her merit and her labour, and that her happiness was never durable. Everything seemed to come easy to her by nature, and circumstances made everything hard; no one was ever more happy by nature or by fate more unhappy. She wrote easily and sweetly, and her first published novel succeeded far beyond her hopes; yet the absolute success that puts a seal on a career always just eluded her, and she was never free to make the effort that might—or so she thought—have won it. So

far as fame was concerned, she lived a life of Tantalus, till all care for that reward had died out of her; and the desire never was masterful. When at last she did the best that was in her to do, she was past caring, if indeed she knew that she had done it. For the other success, which can be counted in money, that, too, came freely to her at the outset, and she was prosperous; yet others with half her talent and less than half her labour earned twice as much, for work not so good as hers. Still she earned what was sufficient for her and for those whom she loved and supported, but that, too, came to bitterness. Her husband was a failure in life; she was able to maintain the household, but he died on her hands. Left a widow, she reared her children with every comfort and advantage, taking all the hardship of the home upon herself. A second family was thrown on her hands when her brother, having failed in business, came to live, a mere wreck of a man, under her roof. She stinted nothing, but worked double tides that his children also might lack nothing in life—putting aside her personal ambition to be ambitious for others. Her own sons failed to profit by the start she had given them; then when a hope of seeing them enter resolutely upon life

dawned in her mind, they, too, died, as her nephew, who was like a son to her, had died before them. One by one the young lives about her went out. She herself had health that nothing could shake, the health that is in itself the joy of living, a sweetness of breath and blood; but it was given to her that she might be all through her life a pillar and prop to sickness. Death struck all about her, in her very arms, but it never touched her, till she was left absolutely alone. She had in herself that well-spring of happiness, the power to make happy faces about her, and to rejoice in the sight of them; but with it went the poignant agony of apprehension which nothing can feel but the keenest love; and the longer she lived the more passionately she loved, and the more cause she had for that agony. She lived the life of Damocles, and the sword fell not once nor twice; and even the last blow, though it was mortal, did not kill mercifully. She lived nearly three years after the death of her last surviving child. Her life was the tragedy of happiness, and she has written it herself.

Her fragmentary Autobiography—even such pages as are merely reminiscences—shows the woman as she was: a creature in whom intensity of feeling was matched with incisive intellect,

prone to analysis, stripping off all illusions and going to the very heart of things, finding bitterness enough, but never losing hope; strong to act, strong to think, strong to endure, and strong to believe; womanly in everything, keen with a woman's keenness, and strong with a woman's strength. Such a temper and faculties in one endowed with a rare gift of expression cannot but have left something that will last, and the best service that can be done to her memory is to disencumber the vital parts in her achievement. Work that means little to its author can never mean much to the world, and it is easy to see from the Autobiography, and from stray passages in the letters, when Mrs. Oliphant wrote because there was a thing in her that demanded to be uttered. We may dismiss at once all the history, biography, and the rest, as hackwork, yet need not for a moment allow that by doing this work she in any way disqualified herself for doing better. All Goldsmith's drudgery—and he wrote, as he said himself pathetically, a volume a month—never harmed *The Vicar of Wakefield*; rather, it went to give that ease of the much practised hand which is half the charm of his masterpiece. And knowledge is never amiss, and the variety of Mrs. Oliphant's enforced reading gave a

richness to her writing. It does not keep one on the stretch with continual expectation of the unexpected word: it is never contorted or tormented, never emphatic, never affected. The words flow simply and smoothly, like the utterance of a perfectly well-bred woman, talking sometimes eagerly, sometimes with a grave earnestness, but more often with a delicate undercurrent of laughter in the tone; and the style answers by a sort of instinct to each inflection of the voice. She is thinking more about what she has to say than about the way in which she is to say it; and Mrs. Oliphant was one of the fortunate who had none of the vehemences and eccentricities of temperament which make it difficult for the writer to arrive at a harmonious manner of expression; nor was she obliged to hide mediocrity under a solemn vesture of language. She knew instinctively the mode of expression suited to her talent, and she was delighted to make the most of it. She had the artist's pleasure "in small technical successes" that Stevenson writes of, and was, by her own avowal, "ever more really satisfied by some little conscious felicity of words than by anything else."

"I have always had my sing-song," she says, "guided by no sort of law but my ear, which

was in its way fastidious to the cadence and measure that pleased me, but it is bewildering to me in my perfectly artless art, if I may use the word at all, to hear of the elaborate ways of forming and enhancing style and all the studies for that end."

Goldsmith would probably have said the same, and though Mrs. Oliphant is not Goldsmith, she is far nearer to the best English than nine-tenths of the later writers whom it is the fashion to praise for excellence in style. She wrote sometimes worse, sometimes better, always with a certain looseness of texture in the sentence; but from her earliest beginnings to the latest of her work there was never a period in which one could not pick out from her writings passages of rare beauty and charm. *Miss Marjoribanks*, perhaps the best written of all her novels, is a model of refined irony—the most difficult of all qualities to achieve—and the conscious pleasure of workmanship is apparent in the neatly turned sentences which round off each chapter cleanly, as if with the crack of a whip, while the laugh hides itself behind a studied decorum of phrase. But for the best of Mrs. Oliphant's writing we should go to the evening of her life—to the period when according to a certain cant of criticism



her whole faculty must have been blunted and worn down by her lifelong disregard of the minuter delicacies of language. The melody in it is simple and not greatly varied; yet there are few pieces of English writing more musical than the *Little Pilgrim in the Unseen*.

It could not, however, be plausibly asserted that Mrs. Oliphant will continue to hold a place in literature for the sake of her style. The versatility of her mind, the variety and extent of her work may secure her a place in the dictionaries, but will not keep her memory alive. If she survives at all it must be in some sort or other as a writer of fiction; and the stories which have a chance to live must be those in which she herself was most interested—into which, consciously or unconsciously, she put most of herself. Without the Autobiography one could guess readily enough: with it we ought to be able to know. It is a little difficult, however, because Mrs. Oliphant, as she says, never took herself or her work very seriously.

“I have written because it gave me pleasure, because it came natural to me, because it was like talking or breathing, besides the big fact that it was necessary for me to work for my children.”

That passage illustrates at once the strength and the weakness of her gift. She wrote simply



from a pleasure in the occupation, to pass away long hours by her mother's bedside. Her family were sympathetic, and made an audience to whom she read out her early attempts; they delighted at her success, but they never talked to her of genius, or encouraged her to spell art with a capital A. Her gift was encouraged and applauded, "but always with a hidden sense that it was an admirable joke." She did her writing at a corner of the family table, joining in whatever talk was going just as if she "had been making a shirt instead of writing a book." Miss Austen, as Mrs. Oliphant herself observes, worked under the same conditions. Still, the very best work is not produced except by those in whom it takes up an enormously large space of life. Miss Austen may have written in a room full of people, but she must have spent innumerable hours in the company of her characters. Scott also was very tolerant of interruptions, but, as he said himself, if there was never five minutes in the day when he was thinking of nothing but his story, so there was also never five minutes when his story was out of his head. Mrs. Oliphant never lived in the life of her characters, as Trollope, for instance, describes himself to have done, and that is why Trollope, in many respects

so inferior to her, is, nevertheless, a greater novelist. Mrs. Oliphant's characters were to her—it is her own illustration—no more than people in a book; and the reason is not far to seek. There were always other things far more engrossing to occupy her mind. Woman-like, she lived her life chiefly in the interests of those about her, and those concerns were always of a nature to leave her no breathing space “to labour with an artist's fervour and concentration to produce a masterpiece.”

In Liverpool, where Mr. Wilson, her father, had some office in the Customs—with characteristic vagueness, she does not know what office—her elder brother Willy “had come by some defeat in life” and was at home idle. Then came reform, a new start, and he went up to London to study at the English Presbyterian College for a ministry in the Church to which the Oliphants belonged. His sister went with him, a small, fierce guardian. It was in those days that *Margaret Maitland* was accepted by Colburn. The reformation continued, and the brother went to take a charge in some small village of Northumberland. There he relapsed and was brought home a mere wreck, incapable of anything but drifting through life. That was when the novelist

first learnt her tenderness for ne'er-do-weels and wastrels. Shortly after this came her marriage to her first cousin, Frank Oliphant. Marriage brought with it happiness and cares. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson followed their daughter to London, and Oliphant did not get on with his mother-in-law. The first child born was a girl, and shortly after the birth of the second—only a year later—Mrs. Wilson sank into a fatal illness. Her daughter nursed her with a passionate devotion.

“At the very end I remember the struggle against overwhelming sleep, after nights and days in incessant anxiety, which made me so bitterly ashamed of the limits of wretched nature. To want to sleep while she was dying seemed so unnatural and so horrible. And, oh me! when all was over, mingled with my grief there was—how can I say it?—something like a dreadful relief.”

To a woman with that bitter habit of analysis was denied even the comfort of illusions. But it gave her a force of insight not common among novelists; there is a strange reflection of this train of thought at the beginning of *Miss Marjoribanks* which tells of the doctor's bereavement, and how he is almost glad to find himself truly sorry for the loss of the wife who had been so little to him.

All that grief can teach, Mrs. Oliphant's indomitable spirit was fated to learn. A few months after her mother's death she lost her second child, a baby of eight months old, and mingled with her sorrow was a shame to know how much deeper this pang struck than the loss of her mother, "who had been everything to her all her life." A third child was born, and died a day old.

"My spirit sank completely under it. I used to go about saying to myself 'A little while and ye shall not see me,' with a longing to get to the end and have all safe—for my one remaining, my eldest, my Maggie, seemed as if she, too, must be taken out of my arms. People will say it was an animal instinct, perhaps. Neither of these little ones could speak to me or exchange an idea or show love, and yet their withdrawal was like the sun going out from the sky—life remained; the daylight continued, but all was different."

Yet gradually her elastic nature recovered itself; they began to go a little into artist society, orders came in to her husband, who was an artist, "and, best of all, our delightful boy was born." That was in November, 1856, four years and a half after their marriage. Within that period she had endured four births

and three deaths. Yet she had written five novels and five-and-twenty articles for 'Blackwood.' *I nunc et versus tecum meditare canoros.* With those agonies knocking at her heart, how was a woman to live the life of imagination? The actual had her by the throat. Yet happiness came back, and for a year or two she lived in the heartease of constant and congenial employment.

"When I look back on my life, among the happy moments which I can recollect is one which is so curiously common and homely, with nothing in it, that it is strange even to record such a recollection, and yet it embodied more happiness to me than almost any real occasion, as might be supposed, for happiness. It was the moment after dinner when I used to run upstairs to see that all was well in the nursery, and then to turn into my room on my way down again to wash my hands, as I had a way of doing before I took up my evening work, which was generally needlework, something to make for the children. My bedroom had three windows in it, one looking out upon the gardens I have mentioned, the other two into the road. It was light enough with the lamplight outside for all I wanted. I can see it now, the glimmer of the outside lights, the room dark, the faint reflection in the glasses, and my heart full of

joy and peace—for what?—for nothing—that there was no harm anywhere, the children well above stairs and their father below. I had few of the pleasures of society, no gaiety at all. I was eight-and-twenty, going downstairs as light as a feather, to the little frock I was making. My husband also gone back for an hour or two after dinner to his work, and well—and the bairnies well. I can feel now the sensation of that sweet calm and ease and peace.”

Then came the forerunner of fresh disaster: her husband coughed up blood. Consumption ran its course rapidly. The pair went to Italy in January, 1859, friendless and all but destitute of money, ignorant of everything that might have smoothed matters. His life lasted some few months, first in Florence, then in Rome, where he died in October, leaving his wife with two helpless children in life and one unborn. When the second boy, born six weeks after his father's death, was three months old, the family struggled home, having for all its fortune “about 1,000*l.* of debt, a small insurance of, I think, 200*l.* on Frank's life, our furniture laid up in warehouse, and my own faculties, such as they were, to make our living and pay off our burdens by.”

Yet even under all this weight of affliction she never lost heart. But in 1860, living in Edinburgh



with her children, they went through one of their worst times. The Blackwoods had been rejecting contributions of hers; and she tells in her History of the firm with what trepidation she went to offer them a serial for the Magazine which was the very apple of their eye: how the two men received her kindly, but gave her little hope; and how she kept down her tears until she was fairly out of the office, and walked home through a bitter north-east wind to the little house where the little ones ran to the door "all gay and sweet" to meet her "wi' flichterin' noise and glee." For the rest of the day she was occupied with them "in a sort of cheerful despair," but when the house was still that night, she sat down and wrote a story, the first of the *Carlingford* series, which made her "almost one of the popularities of literature." She "sat up nearly all night over it in a passion of composition." Next day it was finished and sent up to George Street, and her fortune, "comparatively speaking, was made." In the winter of 1861 she settled down in a tiny house near Ealing, then a real village. Here she stayed for four years, when the need of schooling for her boys made her move to Windsor; and here her chief work as a novelist was done. *Salem Chapel* was written



in 1862, on the whole, perhaps, her best novel. There is a new note perceptible in her correspondence with Blackwood; she is keenly interested in the future, determined to make "an 'it,'" and keenly gratified by the increasing success. The scar that was left by her husband's death had closed up; and she never pretends that her affection for him was the passion of her life. Passion of that kind there was none in her history; she owns in a curiously frank passage of her Autobiography to a sense of "whimsical injury" because she had never in her life "impressed anybody as George Eliot and George Sand did," it is an odd confession of that sort of envy which the virtuous so often appear to feel for famous sinners. But there was a passion in Mrs. Oliphant's life of which "these two bigger women," as she calls them, knew nothing. George Eliot was childless, and George Sand was a mother indeed, but one to whom her child was an interest scarcely competing with her art or her various loves. To Mrs. Oliphant her children were the universe; she lived in them and for them, and in their lives she built up a new happiness to which her own success was only contributory.

Just in these years between 1861 and 1868 she had her chance to achieve greatness as

a novelist, if it lay in her. She was in the maturity of her powers—in 1867 she reached her fortieth birthday—she had no pressing call for money, her children were old enough to be a keen pleasure, not old enough to be an anxiety; her heart was light, and her strength unlimited. She wrote under the keen stimulus of a half-achieved popularity, and she had hit upon the manner best suited to her. People wondered at the knowledge displayed in *Salem Chapel*—where old Tozer is a real creation. But, masterly as *Salem Chapel* is, it cannot be placed higher than in the second rank of fiction; lower certainly than Trollope's best work. Yet Mrs. Oliphant had gifts denied to Trollope; she had eloquence, charm of style, grace and ease where he is heavy and clumsy; above all, she had the power to construct a story full of high-strung situations, yet in no way sinning against common sense; and her insight into feminine character and her skill to depict it at least rival his mastery over men. Why with all these advantages does she get no further? What is it that sets the dividing line between her and George Eliot, or Charlotte Brontë? What is the quality in which Trollope outdoes her so far as to counterbalance all his deficiencies?

It is what may be called force or sincerity: the result of the artist's passionate absorption in his work. Mrs. Oliphant complains in her *Autobiography* that she spoiled her fortunes by making light to others of her own work. In reality she made light of it to herself. It did not mean much to her. Scott had something of the same turn in him, and the consequence is that Scott's work is not so great as it might have been. Read the passages in his journal written under the heaviest stroke of trouble, when he speaks as Shakespeare might have spoken, and you will realise how much greater is Scott than any of his novels. Read this *Autobiography* of Mrs. Oliphant's and you will feel the same. Yet there is all the difference in the world between the two temperaments. Scott was a man, and though he worked lightly and almost carelessly, his work was the central preoccupation of his life. The power of concentrating his whole energy for a long stretch was not in him; he wrote as if by some unconscious process of nature. But the life of imagination was the strongest in him; that was his secret joy, the thing lying deepest in his heart. Mrs. Oliphant was a woman and a mother, and the innermost preoccupation of her mind—the point to which her fluctuating

thoughts would always swing back—was her children. The women who have been great artists have been childless women. George Sand is the one exception, and she would leave her child while she strayed over Italy with de Musset.

The art of the poet indeed may incorporate with itself any emotion; and Mrs. Oliphant revealed the best of her in work that is essentially poetry. But happiness seldom needs to find a voice; and in the days when the first *Carlingford* tales were being written, Mrs. Oliphant was thoroughly happy. It was not for long. In the autumn of 1863 she, with her three children and other dear friends, went to Rome, a party full of gaiety and brightness. And then came back the pain that was “the over-word of her life.” Her daughter, a child of eleven years, was taken ill and died in four days, and was laid beside her father. The mother wrote in her misery:

“I can sleep during the night, and I sleep as long as I can; but when it is no longer possible, when the light can no longer be gainsaid, and life is going on everywhere, then I, too, rise up to bear my burden. How different it used to be! When I was a girl I remember the feeling I had when the fresh morning light came round. Whatever grief there had been the night before, the new day triumphed over

it. Things must be better than one thought, must be well, in a world which woke up to that new light, to the sweet dews and sweet air which renewed one's soul. Now I am thankful for the night and the darkness, and shudder to see the light of the day returning.

“The Principal calls *In Memoriam* an embodiment of the spirit of this age, which he says does not know what to think, yet thinks and wonders and stops itself, and thinks again; which believes and does not believe, and *perhaps*, I think, carries the human yearning and longing further than it was ever carried before. Perhaps my own thoughts are much of the same kind. I try to realise heaven to myself, and cannot do it. The more I think of it, the less I am able to feel that those who have left us can start up at once into a heartless beatitude without caring for our sorrows. Do they sleep until the great day? Or does time so cease for them that it seems but a matter of hours and minutes till we meet again? God who is Love cannot give immortality and annihilate affection; that surely, at least, we must take for granted—as sure as they live, they live to love us. Human nature in the flesh cannot be more faithful, more tender, than the purified human soul in heaven. Where, then, are they;

those who have gone before us? Some people say, around us, still knowing all that occupies us; but that is an idea I cannot entertain either. It would not be happiness, but pain, to be beside those we love, yet unable to communicate with them—unable to make ourselves known. . . .”

That is the note, struck for the first time, of all that is most significant in her work. There was a part of her, not dead but living somewhere, yet inseparably cut off. Living, where and how? That was the question to which her thoughts were to recur, with more and more instant solicitude, at every new separation. To that question, only dreams could give an answer; but these dreams, moulded into beauty for her own comfort and the comfort of others, were to be the truly creative work of her life. Yet she returned at once under the double necessity of bread-winning and of seeking a respite from thought to work as well as before, but in an altered spirit; the little flutter of ambition was crushed out. But in 1868 came the further blow which definitely committed her to over-hasty production. Her brother Frank, in business at Liverpool, failed hopelessly, as it would seem, through no special fault but that incompetence and want of fibre which stamped all the men that in her



life she had to do with, and which is reflected in all the men she draws—just as her own active care of weaker brethren is pictured in a score of her helpful self-confident heroines.

The two elder of his four children, a boy and a girl, came to her; the wife with two others joined him abroad. But in a very little time the wife died, and the man, broken down and all but paralysed, came with his two other children straight to his sister.

It was not in her nature to retrench upon the comfortable way of living to which she had accustomed her household; but she could work double tides, and she did, and was happy, though all her payments for her work were invariably forestalled, and her brother's presence in the household was far from being a source of pleasure. He and she had drifted so far apart that they were, not strangers, but worse. When he died, she wrote that she was glad to find herself sorry. Yet happy she was in the years at Windsor while the three boys were at Eton, happy in their love and brightness in their school successes; for at school all the boys did well, and her hopes were high. In all her books there is a delightful sympathy with youth—with its troubles and its pleasures. 1875, the year of the brother's death, was a



turning point. Frank Wilson, her nephew, had passed high into Cooper's Hill. Cyril, her eldest son, was just leaving Eton for Balliol, and—at least, in his mother's eyes—was a singularly attractive boy; she quotes Chaucer's lines about him:

“Singing he was, and flyting all the day,  
He was as fresh as is the month of May.”

Her youngest, Cecco, was, as he remained till death, clever, good, and entirely devoted to his mother. “There was no prouder woman in the world than I was with the three,” she says. But Frank Wilson died of the first fever that attacked him when he went to the Punjaub; and Cyril Oliphant idled at Oxford, fell into a loose way of living, and drank—yet never without hope of recovery. In the opening chapters of *The Wizard's Son*, published in 1884, Mrs. Oliphant sketches the agony of a mother who sees the son of her hopes drifting aimlessly at the outset of life, and who fears alike to widen the breach between her and him by too much reproof and to fail of her duty by too much indulgence. In 1890 she was still hoping to find him make a real start, when the end came, and her boy died. She had done all she could for him, and it had availed nothing;

she did not even spare herself the pang of thinking that things might have been better, had she done less and taught a more strenuous lesson. He was dead, like her firstborn, her woman child; her surviving son was weakly; and she, with her indomitable health and her fever of apprehension was left to labour in the familiar routine, spending more and more of her life in thoughts of that other dim conjecturable world whither so much of her had passed already.

Long before this her thoughts had been busy with it. In the end of 1878 she wrote the first of her stories of the Unseen—*The Beleaguered City*—which relates how in the city of Semur the dead by reason of the impiety of the living came back, and for a little while ousted the sinners from their homes; and how during those days the men encamped round about the town, which was enveloped in a thick darkness, but were at every point repulsed from it by an invisible and impassable barrier. Mrs. Oliphant possessed that art of circumstantial invention in which Swift, Defoe and Bunyan are the great masters. Like them she obtains a credibility for her narrative by presenting vividly through the narrative the character of the narrator. There is no other man known to us in her books so distinctly as the

Mayor of Semur, who draws up, as if officially, the *procès-verbal* of the whole affair: just a good type of the French *bourgeois*—brave, homely, kindly, full of a sense of duty and of law's majesty, especially as incorporated in his own official person; Voltairian by temper and training, yet respectful to the amiable beliefs of others. He begins and ends the story of the exodus and the return. But in the meanwhile other narratives are included: the story told by Lecamus, the visionary, a living man, yet more at home among the dead than the living, to whom it was permitted to stay in the town and at last to come with a message from the dead to those who would not be convinced; and, chiefly, the narrative of Agnès Dupin, the Mayor's wife, one of those more spiritually-minded women who saw as well as felt when the invisible hands pushed the population out of the gates. She saw what no man saw, what only some among the women could see—she saw her dead child.

There you have the key to it all. To certain men perhaps the dead are not dead; the wife of Lecamus comes back to him, and for a moment they have the joy of each other's presence: Mrs. Oliphant writes of this as if she believed it. But that the dead are to many mothers

truly living is more than a belief with her; it is a kind of revelation. What she writes of again and again in all these fancies of the Unseen is the meeting and greeting between mother and child. The only blessedness that she can conceive of is something like the highest blessedness that she knew in this world, but perfected and completed. Writing in her sketch of her life about the days when anxieties of all kinds were thickest, she sets this down:

“Lately in my many sad musings, it has been brought very clearly before my mind how often all the horrible tension, the dread, the anxiety which there are no words strong enough to describe—which devoured me, but which I had to conceal often behind a smiling face—would yield in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of a voice, at the first look, into an ineffable ease and the overwhelming happiness of relief from pain, which is, I think, our highest human sensation, higher and more exquisite than any positive enjoyment in this world. It used to sweep over me like a wave, sometimes when I opened a door, sometimes in a letter—in all simple ways. I cannot explain, but if this should ever come to the eye of any woman in the

passion and agony of motherhood, she will more or less understand. I was thinking lately, or rather, as sometimes happens, there was suddenly presented to my mind, like a suggestion from some one else, the recollection of these ineffable happinesses, and it seemed to me that it meant that which would be, when one pushed through that last door and was met—oh, by what, by whom?—by instant relief. The wave of sudden ease and warmth and peace and joy! I felt, to tell the truth, that it was one of them who brought that to my mind, and I said to myself, ‘I will not want any explanation, I will not ask any question—the first touch, the first look, will be enough, as of old, yet better than of old.’ ”

And because she was an artist this strong central preoccupation of her life took shape in form of art. *The Beleaguered City*, which is, properly speaking, not a story but a poem, though it is pitched studiously in the key of prose, and touched often with a delicate humour, was the first work of her life which she wrote neither for amusement nor to make money, but because she was possessed by it. When it was in the doing she wrote to Blackwood: “I have wasted a good deal of time upon it,

which is foolish, but the subject struck my fancy." The habit of belittling her own work was native to her, and was of long standing; and where that habit is formed, the closer any piece of work lies to the heart of the artist, the harder it is to speak of. When Mrs. Oliphant said this to her publisher, she was saying, we are certain, as much as she could bring herself to say. It is the true *εἰρῶνε'ία*, that untranslatable word of the Greek. And to the end of her life stories of the unseen she could only write—as she expresses it herself—when they came to her; they were not written to order or for money.

*The Beleaguered City* was followed two years later, in 1882, by *The Open Door*, nothing more than the story of a voice—not an apparition, but a voice—and of its effect upon various temperaments. It argues no more than the belief that the disembodied creature roams about familiar places, seeking to re-establish communication with the living, and may by an act of faith or submission find its way to peace. The story can be fitted into Mrs. Oliphant's theory—if that be the right word—of the unseen world; but it does not imply, much less express, that theory. Her first attempt to set into coherent form by the dramatic means



most familiar to her hand the result of her ponderings on what death might mean, was made a few months later when she wrote *The Little Pilgrim in the Unseen*. Here, for the first time, she tells us that she worked upon a definite suggestion given by her own experience: the death in sleep of a dear neighbour of hers, a very simple, almost childish, little old maid.

What she does in her story, if the story it can be called, is to picture the awakening of this little woman after her painless death. It is the happy awakening, yet the pilgrim does not know what has happened; but, as Mrs. Oliphant gently imagines it, there are people set to receive the newcomer and explain. Whether it be in a final state or an intervening one, she has no care to decide: but it is the state of the blessed after death. Her "Little Pilgrim" is confronted at once when she awakens beyond the passing with thoughts of her past life: so it is always, as Mrs. Oliphant pictures the future. But she has in all her life done nothing but kindness, and she has left none behind her from whom it is an agony to part; so there is nothing in her mind but tenderness as she thinks of others. In her great tenderness she thinks of the friend she has left, and thus for the first time this unseen world is



related directly to her who imagines it. As the Pilgrim is thinking "what a pleasure it would be to make something clear that had been dark before to this friend," there stands by her a maiden, with something in her look by which the Pilgrim divines that she was one who "had come here as a child and had grown up in this celestial place." In short, Mrs. Oliphant pictures to herself her own child in paradise, not as one who has become a stranger, but grown as she would have grown, only with a diviner growth, dwelling neither out of sight nor hearing of this world, but so near it that she recognises and welcomes her mother's friend.

Of all these writings this is, perhaps, the most beautiful; and its boldness is not less than its beauty. For the "Little Pilgrim," being of those for whom no purgation is needed to fit her for a land where love is the only law, is taken to see great mysteries and is set upon high employments. In that country, as Mrs. Oliphant conceives it, there is no inequality, since there is no envy or rivalry, but there is endless diversity of gifts and of tasks; and each task is its own reward. The "Little Pilgrim," when she has seen the tasks of others, is set to receive those who come in, and their awakening is not always gentle like hers; some are

in terror, some strange and doubting, and they are sent on different ways. Those different ways Mrs. Oliphant has elsewhere tracked out; but when she wrote this book she was happy, and thinking only of those whom she could not conceive as other than blessed.

The next of her stories in this kind was also suggested to her by the personality of a friend who, beautiful in her youth, remained beautiful and courted in extreme old age. *Old Lady Mary* is one of the finest short stories in the language. The picture of the old lady, with her delicacy and her beauty, her soft shawls and laces, the soft rustle of her dress, and all her daintinesses, is presented to the eye in a way that Gainsborough or Reynolds could not have surpassed in paint; and by a wonderful subtlety of suggestion it is shown how one whose life has run all on velvet and never so smoothly as towards the close, may come almost to disbelieve in death, till she neglects even to provide for the future of the girl companion whom she loves. "Lady Mary" dies quietly in her sleep; and she, too, wakens with a sense of wonder, and is set to contemplate her life. Then there rises up this awful thing she has done. For a jest, merely to show her lawyer, who has always urged her to make her will,

that she can manage everything quite well for herself, she has made her will secretly and hidden it, meaning to surprise him with it some day. No one knows that it exists, and for want of it her godchild must be a beggar; and she cries out for means to set it right. That is why she comes back to the world as a ghost, invisible among those she loves, but hearing the hard things that are said of her, and powerless to put the wrong right, or to assure her child that it was through no lack of love. At last, but after long bitterness, love breaks through the barrier; "Lady Mary" does not achieve her purpose, for the will is only discovered by a chance; but she sees her godchild for a moment face to face through the veil, and knows that love has never doubted of her.

The other three writings which should be mentioned are less perfect as works of invention, but in some ways of keener interest. *The Land of Darkness*, published in 1888, is a complement to *The Little Pilgrim*, where Mrs. Oliphant has sketched such an Inferno as her imagination permitted her to conceive: a hell where no one is kept but by his own unsubmitted will. There are stages in this Inferno, the city of lawless men, the city of dreadful law, the city of unrelenting pleasure, the city of soulless

art; but from all these a way of escape, difficult indeed, and terrible, but not impassable, lies always open over the Dark Mountains; and the last chapter in the book describes the ascent as seen from above by the watchers on the mountains, who are appointed to sit in towers on the outposts and signal the approach of each wanderer's coming, and to hope that at last it may prove to be the one for whom they wait, and whom they shall accompany homeward, leaving their post to some new watcher awaiting some other wanderer.

The iron had gone deep in her woman's heart when she wrote this. Her eldest son, Cyril—whom she loved with that passion that a woman gives most to those who give love but also give pain—had long harassed her life with his failings, and the breakdown of his health made the end inevitable. Yet when it came, the shock was appalling. "I am like stone," she writes—but not torpid; her only refuge was in work, and her mind was always "quickened into intolerable life by calamity." For another four years she nursed her one remaining child, living in his life, and regaining even cheerfulness. But in October, 1894, her Cecco also died. "He is gone from me," she cried, "my last and dearest, and I am left here a desolate

woman with the strength of a giant in me, and may live for years and years."

Her happiness that had survived so many blows now lay dead in her, and for a moment it seemed as if her energy was dead too. She could not even work. But she rallied and found some comfort in her sorrow in writing the beautiful paper called *Fancies of a Believer*. Here she sets out with an imagination strangely logical the groundwork of all her conception of what lies beyond the grave. These, her "fancies," are the outcome of a mind which, born "in an age at once more believing and more unbelieving than many of the ages that have preceded it," was one "whose nature it is to believe rather than to doubt." Believing in God, and a loving God, she sees in the world a great experiment created for God's glory and the delight of the angels. She has the feeling inalienable from the human race that, whatever other worlds may whirl in space, this one has a special and high significance. She conceives of it as offering to a universe, where law reigns absolutely, the spectacle of one world in which there is the power to choose evil, showing to the angels a glory of creatures in so many ways infinitely inferior to them, "but in this for ever greater than they, that,

having the gift of free will and choice, they chose for God." There are limits set to the power to choose. "This is not a consistent world any more than it is a just one." The Land of Darkness which she has pictured is a land of men exiled from God's intervention, and left merely to the devices of their own heart, yet for ever endowed with the power to remember and turn to God and to love. She comforts herself with a fancy of Christ's special Companionship, made up by young men, like himself cut off in their prime; some of them, perhaps, defeated in this world, with no blazon on their shields, but set to a new hope and new life in the same service.

The last remaining of these pieces, *The Land of Suspense*, is surely one of the strangest things ever written: a mother's vision of the punishment meted to her firstborn son. It is a gentle doom yet a stern one; she pictures him as living in a beautiful land peopled only by voices; for in it dwell those, like himself, who keep the consciousness of their bodily selves and bodily members, but are to themselves and to each other invisible though able to converse. In a city of that land which stands with open, but impassable, gates, his father waits for him in the transfigured shape,



and knows his coming, but sorrows that it should be in this manner; and the young man puts from him the offered consolation and rebels in his heart till at last he sees his brother, too, coming by the way he came, but coming with his man's shape and, then, for the first time he rises beyond his own self, and thinks for the mother left desolate. The answer to his prayer for his mother is the end of punishment for himself. That is how the desolate woman consoled herself with thoughts that her own sorrow might work out her son's deliverance. Yet the last word of all is in its pathos almost unbearable: "As for the prayer which he made, and which was answered in a way which he asked not, it is still unfulfilled."

Motherhood was the soul of Mrs. Oliphant's life; it was the hindrance to high achievement in the way of the novelist's art; it was also the inspiration of the wisest and most beautiful things that she wrote. It made of her life the tragedy of happiness, but bestowed upon her memory a noble and tragic beauty.

M. 13-3  
R. 13-3









